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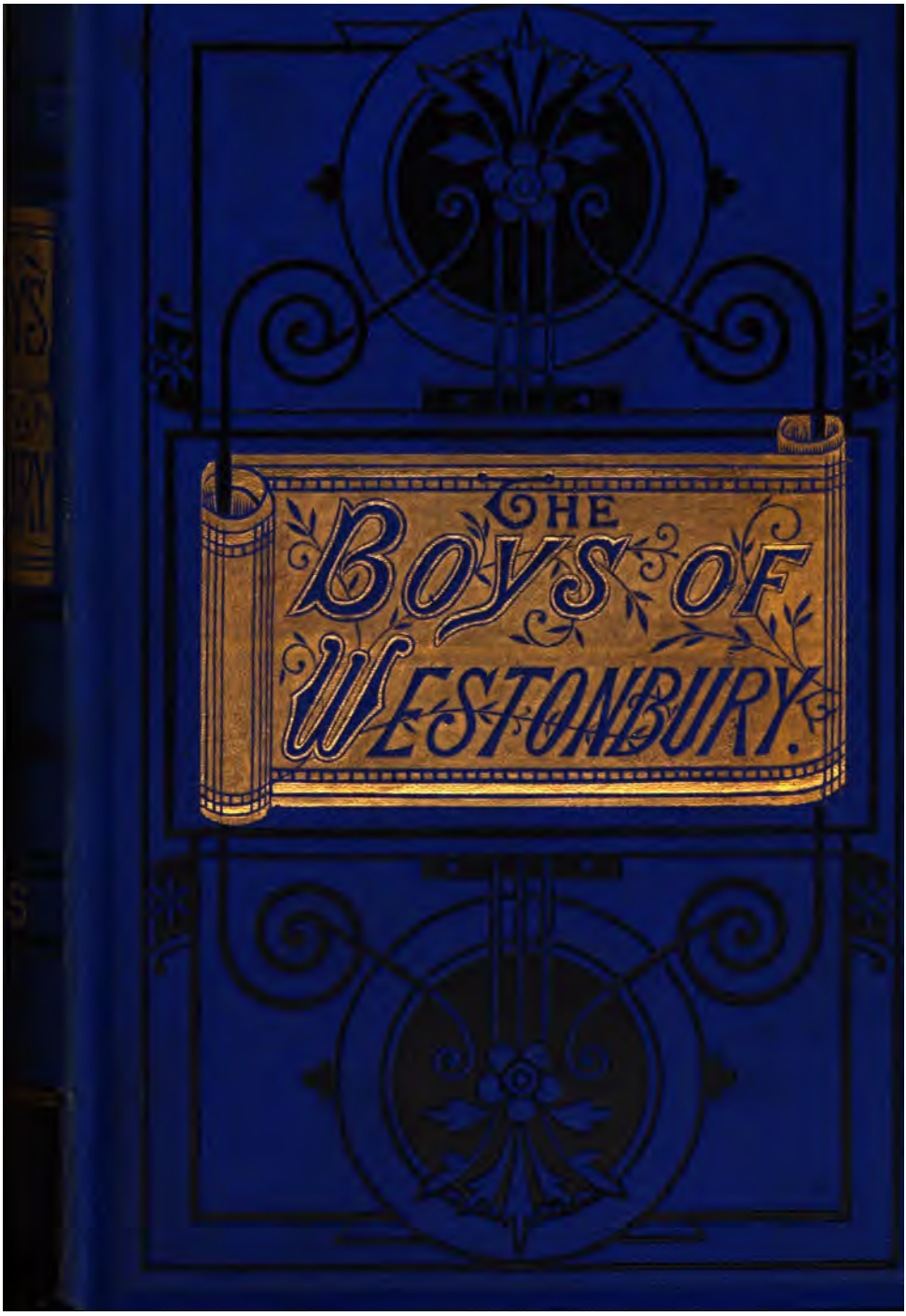
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THE
BOYS OF
WESTONBURY.

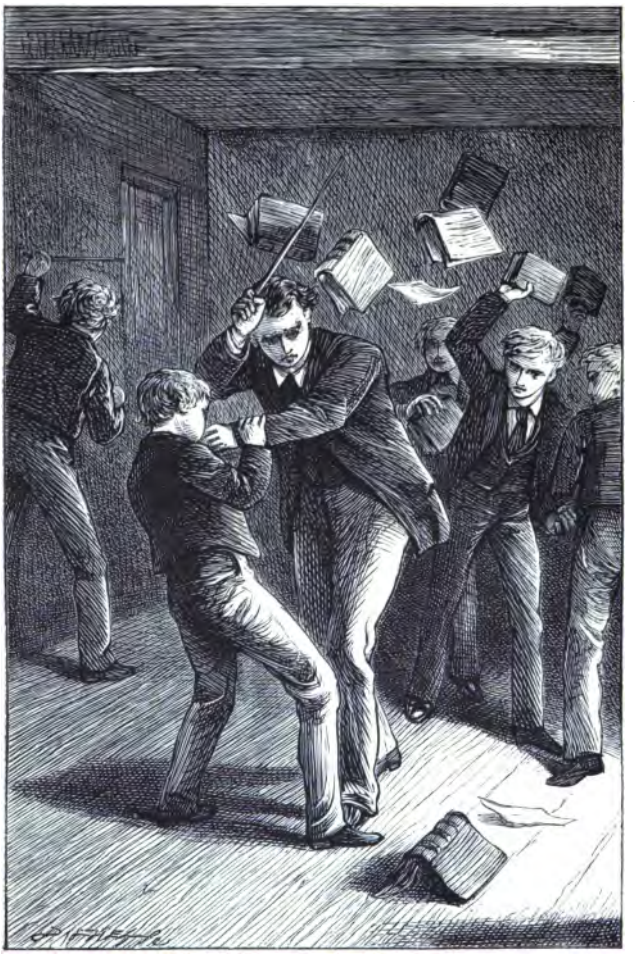

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THE BOYS OF WESTONBURY.



THE BOYS OF WESTONBURY.





Front. THE BOOKING OF PARSONS.—P. 293

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NEW YORK: 416 BROOME STREET
1853.



THE

BOYS OF WESTONBURY;

OR,

THE MONITORIAL SYSTEM.

BY THE

REV. H. C. ADAMS,

VICAR OF DRY SANDFORD.

Author of "Schoolboy Honour," "Wroxby College," etc., etc.

"Qui plebeius est Præfectis obtemperato
Qui Præfectus est, legitime imperato."
WILLIAM OF WYKEHAM.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

LONDON:
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS,
THE BROADWAY, LUDGATE.
NEW YORK: 416 BROOME STREET.
1878.

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TO THE

REV. H. G. MERRIMAN, D.D.,

RECTOR OF MICHELMERSH,

LATE HEAD MASTER OF GUILDFORD AND BRIDGNORTH GRAMMAR SCHOOLS.

MY DEAR MERRIMAN,

This tale will bring before you the old times, when we were colleagues in office at a Public School, and learned, by practical experience, the administration of the Monitorial System. It is a satisfaction to me to know that you, with your long experience of school teaching, in the main agree with my views of the important subject which this book handles. This conviction is one of the many considerations which embolden me to inscribe your name in its first page.

Ever affectionately yours,

H. C. ADAMS.

Cothill, June, 1877.

PREFACE.

I SHALL not be surprised if a complaint is made that this book overstates, some perhaps will think very greatly, the amount of hardship and suffering which younger boys have to undergo at a Public School—at all events at the Public Schools of the present day. It may be so. It would be a very difficult, as well as a very delicate matter, to ascertain the truth or falsehood of such an allegation. The reader will take notice that the tale is dated some forty or fifty years back. This has been done mainly for the purpose of escaping the necessity of any such inquiry, and also to prevent the possibility of an attempt to identify Westonbury with any of our leading Public Schools. It will not, I think, be denied that these pages present no unfair picture of them, as they then existed.

It is the general belief, and I share it, that the tone of all our great Schools has softened considerably within the interval named; but that, be it observed, does not affect the main question at issue. Bullying, of one kind or another, there always will be in large

schools, while human nature remains what it is. It may take the shape of the infliction of sharp physical pain and privation, or that of petty moral persecution and annoyance. But bullying there will always be, and in whatever shape it may occur, it is a ruinous evil to all concerned in it. The question is, how can this be most successfully repressed? Does the monitorial system afford the best means of keeping it under control, or is it powerless for this purpose, or does it again only aggravate the evil? The inquiry applies to all large Schools alike, whatever may be their tone or peculiarities. The authority of monitors may be employed equally under a harsh or a mild system; to the infliction or the restraint of barbarous cruelty in the one instance, or mere teasing in the other, just as trial by jury may be used to determine a case of savage murder or petty libel. Public feeling on the subject is in a very unsettled state. There are warm and intelligent advocates for and against the system: it is surely desirable that the question should be decisively and finally determined.

THE

BOYS OF WESTONBURY.

CHAPTER I.

IN a small village on the western coast of England, some forty or fifty years ago, there was living a disabled Indian officer, whose name was Oliver. His was a sad, though not a very uncommon, history. He had been an only son, and his father, after completing his son's education, had just succeeded in procuring for him an Indian cadetship, when his sudden death left the young man without any near relative, and almost without a friend in the world. Mr. Oliver had lived in retirement for many years, and his son had never left home, except for his private tutor's house. He had, however, formed a friendship with Charles Poole, one of his fellow-pupils, and it was a great comfort to him, in his bereaved state, to learn that his friend, like himself, was about to proceed to India, in order to join the army. They sailed to Calcutta by the same vessel, and for the first two years their regiments were stationed at the same town. The intimacy which had been begun in an English parsonage was now cemented under Eastern skies—in the barrack and

in the tent. Poole had hopes of advancement through the interest of his uncle, General Sydenham, a veteran officer holding an important command in the Company's service, who noticed with favour not only his nephew, but his nephew's companion, as gentlemanly and spirited lads. In the second year of their stay in India, both young men married, and a son was born to each; little Charlie Poole being the senior by about two months of Harry Oliver.

Their domestic happiness was interrupted by the outbreak of the Burmese War. In one of the early battles of the campaign, Oliver received a sabre-cut, which compelled him to return to head-quarters. The fever of the wound was aggravated by the burning heat and the journey; and on his arrival at his destination, his distress was further increased by the tidings that his wife had been carried off by a sudden illness a week or two previously.

The poor young fellow was completely crushed by this misfortune. Had it not been for his child and its utter helplessness among strangers, he would probably have sunk under the blow. As it was, he resolved to live for his boy's sake; but it seemed for a long time as though this was not to be. His wound obstinately refused to heal, and at length the doctors informed him that his best, if not his only, hope of recovery consisted in his returning to England for two years at the least. Oliver complied, rather glad of the necessity of leaving, if only for a time, a place associated in his own mind with so many sorrows. He engaged his passage, along with his child and its Hindoo nurse, by one of the large ships which made the voyage in about four months,

and with the elasticity of youth, took leave of his friend Charles, fully persuaded that the English air would entirely restore him, and that in a year, or two years at furthest, he would return to India a sound man.

The long sea voyage did do much for him, as it has done for many an invalid similarly circumstanced. He arrived in London full of spirits, and wrote a letter to Lieutenant Poole, in which he expressed his gratitude for the medical care he had received in India, but hinted that he thought that the solicitude respecting him had been somewhat unreasonable. "The doctors here," he wrote, "tell me that I must, of course, remain a twelvemonth in England, and that I must go to some sea-side place, where I can have at once a mild air and entire quiet; but they assure me there are no grounds for uneasiness. In fact, they speak in a manner which convinces me that they have no fears at all of the result."

In course of post, he received a reply from his friend as kind and cordial as he could have desired. "Nothing can be better than your report of yourself," he wrote. "We have just been toasting old Wharton at the mess as the prince of all Galens. But you do not mention in your letter where you propose establishing yourself. I am rather glad of this, because I have a scheme to propose to you, which I hope may not interfere with any arrangement which you have yet made. You know I am, like yourself, an orphan, and my father, though he married a second time, never had any child but myself. The house at Barstone, in E—shire, where I was born, and where my boy life was passed, has

just reverted to me by the death of my stepmother. It is a fair-sized house, with a dozen acres or so of woodland round it, and close upon the sea-coast. I won't sell it, for one of my dreams has ever been to come home some day—when I am a general, perhaps, like my uncle—and pass my old age there. As for letting it, the place is sequestered, there are no good roads to it, and no neighbourhood to speak of. I doubt if I could get a tenant to my mind—indeed, there are very few tenants whom I should like to see there. Anyhow, the rent I should receive is not sufficient to induce me to run the risk of getting an unsatisfactory one. At the same time, I want the old house and grounds nicely kept up, and should like to feel that there was some one in possession whom I could thoroughly trust.

"Now, the long and short of all this rigmarole is—as I dare say you have already guessed—that I want you to go and live at Barstone, until you are a sound man again. It will, I really think, exactly suit you. You are recommended quiet, and, unless you are to locate yourself on a rock in the middle of the Pacific, you could hardly find a quieter situation than Barstone. The air is remarkably mild and salubrious, and there is a good medical man a few miles off. The house, again, though not very large, is warm, tight, and comfortable; and my father's old housekeeper, whom I shall retain in my service, together with her young niece, will take every care of you and your little boy. She is a worthy soul, and would do anything for a friend of mine. Of course there will be no talk of rent between us. Friendship apart, you will amply repay me by first putting, and then keeping,

the old house, etc., in repair for as long as you may want it."

This letter came most opportunely. Lieut. Oliver had already found his means only just sufficient to provide himself and his child with the shabbiest genteel lodgings, in the cheapest sea-side place he could find; and the discomforts of small rooms, bad cookery, and slovenly attendance were a sore trial to a sick man, used to the luxurious *ménages* of India. He wrote thankfully accepting his friend's offer, and, indeed, only waited until he had heard from Mrs. Jenkins that Holm House—so his friend's place was named—was ready for his reception, before journeying thither with the nurse and child.

He found that Poole had not exaggerated either the healthiness or the beauty of his native village. The sea-coast was wild and rocky, and the Atlantic sometimes, though rarely, beat against it with a fury, that was as terrible as it was picturesque; but the red cliffs were intersected by valleys richly wooded and watered, affording an endless variety of sylvan walks; and the Holm itself, standing on a soft slope at some little distance from the sea, of which it commanded lovely views, was sheltered from the severer blasts by its embowering groves. Barstone and Barmouth, which lay at the distance of a quarter of a mile, were primitive and simple hamlets, containing a mixed population of labourers and fishermen. The nearest town, Binford, was situated eight or nine miles off, and railways were as yet (in that part of the country, at all events) things undreamed of. With the exception of the curate (the vicar was non-resident),

the doctor mentioned by Poole, and one or two of the better sort of farmers, there were no persons with whom to exchange visits. This circumstance was, however, rather agreeable than otherwise to the young man. His recent heavy affliction, and the lassitude following after severe bodily suffering, indisposed him to make new acquaintances. He settled himself in the quiet and charming spot which so happy a chance had assigned him; resolved, for his child's sake, no less than his own, to regain his health, and return to his duty, if it should be possible, within a year of his arrival.

But the old saying, *L'homme propose, mais Dieu dispose*, proved true in this instance, as it has in so many others. For a time the lieutenant appeared to gain strength. But in the following spring the wound broke out afresh; and the summer and autumn, aided by all Dr. Travers's skill, hardly restored the vigour thus lost. The same disaster occurred again and again, leaving him on the whole neither better nor worse than before. At length, after five or six years' residence at Barstone, not Dr. Travers only, but the eminent London doctors whom the latter had called in, told him plainly that he must renounce the hope, so persistently cherished, of returning to Calcutta. His life might be protracted for many years, without any increase of suffering, but he would never be fit for active service again.

This news was conveyed by letter to his friend, now Major Poole. The latter had risen rapidly, and had more than once been favourably noticed by Lord Keane. He wrote back a letter of condolence by the next mail. It grieved him much, he said, to be obliged to give up the thought of

his friend's companionship; but it was some satisfaction that Oliver had at least found a comfortable home in England, and there he trusted he would remain. Such an arrangement would also be satisfactory to him in another way. His own boy, Charlie, now about seven years old, must be sent to England, and Mrs. Poole could not leave her other children. He hoped that Oliver would take charge of the lad, and bring him up along with little Harry, until both were old enough to be sent to an English public school. He knew his friend to be quite competent to teach the elementary parts of a boy's education, and he had perfect confidence in him. He engaged also, at the same time, to pay a very handsome annual sum for his education.

The reader will not require to be told that Mr. Oliver cheerfully undertook the office thus proposed to him. He did so the more readily, because, as he informed his friend, a change had recently taken place at Barstone, which would be beneficial to both boys. The old non-resident vicar was dead, and Mr. Locke, a man of forty, with a wife and a young family, had recently settled at the long-disused Vicarage. The new incumbent was a gentleman and a scholar, and would be able to undertake the education of the boys, in subjects with which the lieutenant himself was but imperfectly acquainted. There would be also the companionship of his children, who, though some years younger than Charlie and Harry, were nevertheless old enough to be their playmates.

In the course of a few months Charlie Poole arrived, a fine manly little fellow, somewhat taller and stronger than

Harry Oliver; sufficiently so to cause him to take the lead in their boyish games, but not to destroy Harry's pleasure in his society.

Charlie was also the better in respect of capacity for learning; but the other had had the advantage of more careful training, so that the two were, on the whole, well matched. Together they drudged patiently through "Eton Latin Grammar" and "Valpy's Delectus;" together they yawned over "Bonnycastle's Arithmetic," and inked themselves up to the eyes in transcribing copies in small text and running hand. Three times a week did they repair to the Vicarage for Church Catechism and nonsense verses, sharing on these occasions in the studies of little Herbert Locke, who, though two years younger and very delicate, was nevertheless an especial favourite with both the elder boys. The lieutenant was able to transmit monthly a favourable report to Poonshedabad; and Charlie's own blotted scrawls assured his father that "he was wel and hapy," and that the Olivers, father and son, were "a couple of bricks"—generally, however, adding that little Herbert Locke was the jolliest of the whole party.

"So happily the days of Thalaba went by." But notwithstanding the warm attachment which the lieutenant conceived for his new pupil, he soon became aware that Charlie's character was a difficult one to deal with. His own boy was hasty and hot tempered, but his fits of anger were soon followed by penitence. In an hour at furthest, after any outbreak, he was willing to forgive, or himself sue for forgiveness, as the case might be. But it was different with Charlie.

He had more command of himself when provoked, but could with difficulty be appeased when roused to anger. If he could be persuaded that he had been to blame, he would frankly say so, and make reparation. But, in general, argument had little effect with him, and coercion only awoke more determined resistance.

Mr. Oliver had a proof of this not long after the boy's arrival. Major Poole had sent over several presents for Harry Oliver, and among these the most prized was a specimen of the curious little animal, called the mangoost. Harry, who had heard his father relate how this creature would destroy, without injury to itself, the most deadly of the Indian snakes, was greatly delighted with his present. A box for it was made by Harry's own hands, and secured by a spring lock of very curious construction, given to him by his father. As the animal was at first quite wild, the door was always kept locked; and no one knew the secret of the spring except Mr. Oliver, Harry, and Charlie Poole, from whom his friend could keep nothing concealed. It was Harry's great delight to keep "Pooney," as the mangoost was called, regularly supplied with as many mice and birds as a vast number of traps set all over the premises could furnish. But he would allow no one else to handle it or give it food; and this was resented by Charlie, who considered that the mangoost, which had come over from India under his protection, was, in some sort, his property. Several small passages of arms occurred, which little Herbert Locke, the general peacemaker, was unable to quell, and which culminated at last in an open quarrel.

"You have nothing to do with Pooney," said Oliver; "I read every word of Major Poole's letter. He gave him to me, and he said nothing of his belonging to any one else."

"It was only because I asked him, that papa sent him to you at all," retorted Charlie, "and I am sure he didn't mean that I was to have nothing to do with him. I recollect quite well his saying what an amusement Pooney would be to us —not to you only, mind, Harry, but to us both."

"If he said that," said Herbert, "I am sure Harry wouldn't dispute your having a share in him."

"Aye, if he said it," returned Harry, who was getting angry; "but who knows he did say it?"

"Do you mean to say that I lie?" asked Poole, indignantly. "I have a great mind to lick the impudence out of you."

"You had better try that," retorted Harry.

"Stop, stop, Charlie," said Herbert, "I am sure Harry didn't mean to say you told a lie. Harry, I wish you 'd explain what you meant."

But Locke's well-meant entreaties were cut short by the outbreak of actual hostilities; and he knew too well that when proceedings once commence in the "Boys' Final Court of Appeal," there is small hope of reason being listened to. He stood sadly by, while his two friends proceeded, in the poetic language of Dr. Watts, "to tear each other's eyes." But little Anne Waters, the scrub of the house, did not view the combat with the same philosophy. Frightened and scandalized, she rushed into the garden to warn Mr. Oliver of what was going on, and the latter arrived in time to prevent further damage, than what could be removed by the use

of a basin and towel. Having listened attentively to the statements of the belligerents, he gave judgment in favour of his son. Nothing, he said, in Major Poole's letter had intimated that the mangoost was to be the joint property of the boys; and though Harry ought not to refuse to allow his friend to play with it, that was matter of favour, and could not be claimed as a right. Charlie considered this decision to be unjust, and made bold to tell his preceptor so, using very plain terms in stating his opinion. Mr. Oliver was extremely angry at the boy's impertinence, which required severe notice. He told Charlie that, as a proper punishment for his offence, he would not be allowed to see the mangoost again, until he had duly asked pardon. Charlie answered stubbornly that he never wanted to see the brute again; he wished it had never come into the house, and the sooner it was gone the better. Mr. Oliver requited this fresh outbreak with a stinging box on the ear, and a threat of a severe caning, unless Charlie immediately adopted a different tone.

The boy at once left the room, but, as was plainly enough evident, neither cowed nor contrite. The next morning the mangoost was missing. The cage stood in its usual place, and the door was firmly secured; but the animal was gone, and no trace of it could be found. Harry was furiously indignant. He remembered his companion's words on the previous day, and was quite convinced that Charlie had taken Pooney out of his cage, and hidden it away somewhere, in revenge for the punishment he had received.

"I am sure he has done it, papa," he said. "You don't

know how angry he can get, or what he won't do when he is angry. He said last night, when we were going up to bed, that he hated you, and that he hated me too. He wished he had never come to England, and that he meant to write to his papa and complain. He said we should soon find out that he was not to be punished unjustly for nothing."

"You are sure he said that, Henry?" inquired Mr. Oliver, startled at the words.

"Yes, papa, quite sure; and, besides, who else could have let Pooney out? I looked at him just before we went to bed, and he was quite safe. The door was shut as tight as could be, and so it was this morning. No one, but we three, knows how to open the lock."

"Well, it is strange, certainly," said Mr. Oliver. "I cannot see in what other way the cage can have been opened; but very probably Charlie has only done it to frighten you. I will send for him, and ask him."

Charlie was accordingly summoned, and came into the room, looking, if possible, rather more haughty and offended than when he had parted from Mr. Oliver on the previous day.

"Charlie," began the elder gentleman, "somebody has let Harry's mangoost out of its cage." He paused, as if expecting some answer, but young Poole said nothing.

"Do you hear?" repeated Mr. Oliver, "the mangoost is gone."

"I hear that," said the boy, coldly.

"Very well; then I wish to ask if you know anything about it?"

"Mr. Oliver," said Poole, "you wouldn't believe my word yesterday, and I shall not answer any questions if I am not believed."

"This won't do, sir," said the lieutenant. "I shall insist upon your answering. Remember, it was only yesterday that you threatened to do something, which would show that you were not going to be punished, as you expressed it, for nothing."

"To whom did I say that?" inquired Poole.

"To me!" interposed Harry, hotly; "and I think it very mean of you to resort to such a thing as this, that's more."

"Hush, Harry," said Mr. Oliver, noticing the angry and defiant look which Charlie cast at his son. "Do you deny having said what Harry reports?"

"No, I don't deny it," said the boy, scornfully. "Make the most of it if you like it."

"Very well. Independently of that, you are aware that the lock of the mangoost's cage can only be opened by touching a spring, known to no one in the house but three persons. Harry and I are ready to declare that we did not let the mangoost out. I don't say that you did; but I think I have a right to require that you also should say, whether or not you opened the cage."

"I shall not answer any questions if my word is not believed," repeated Charlie, doggedly.

"You won't? Then you will take the consequences. But I shall not act hastily. I shall give you till this time to-morrow for reflection. If you then persist in your contumacy, I shall flog you soundly."

Mr. Oliver put on his hat, and went out for his morning walk. Poole also left the room, refusing to pay any heed to Harry, who was much distressed at the turn events had now taken. He went down to the Vicarage, and took counsel with Herbert, who promised his help in making another appeal to Charlie's feelings; but the scheme was marred by the disappearance of the latter, who was seen no more until the following morning, when he walked into Harry's room with the mangoost in his hand. He laid it down on the bed with the simple remark, "Here is Pooney, Harry."

"Oh, thank you, Charlie. I am so glad you have brought him back. I knew it was all fun. Now there will be an end to this."

"I do not know what you mean by my having brought him back. Anyhow, there he is." He turned and left the room as he spoke.

Harry replaced the mangoost, and then going up to his father's room, told him what had happened.

"It is all right now, papa," he said; "isn't it?"

"No," said Mr. Oliver. "I am glad he has had the grace to bring your pet back; I was afraid he had let him run off into the woods. But this does not atone for his misconduct and insolence. He shall beg my pardon, or undergo his flogging."

Harry would have remonstrated, but he knew his father too well to do so. He sought out his friend, and tried to induce him to say he was sorry, in which case he knew all would be right again. But however difficult of persuasion the lieutenant might be, Harry found that Charlie was still

more so. The three met at the breakfast-table, but the meal was eaten almost in silence. At its conclusion, Mr. Oliver briefly said, "Charles, you will have the goodness to step with me into my study."

The boy obeyed in silence. Young Oliver remained in the breakfast-room, as vexed and angry as the other two.

"Charles," said the elder gentleman, taking a riding-whip in his hand, "I told you yesterday that I should feel it my duty to flog you if you did not explain what you knew about the disappearance of Harry's mangoost, and ask pardon for such a display of sullen and rebellious temper. You may think that bringing the animal back sets the whole matter right, but that is a mistake. I ask you, for the last time, do you choose to give me any satisfaction on the subject?"

"You have disbelieved my word," repeated Charlie, in the same tone as before.

The lieutenant raised his whip, and was on the point of bringing it down on Poole's shoulders, when the door burst open, and Harry Oliver rushed into the room, dragging little Anne Waters after him. The latter, whose eyes were red with crying, and who looked terribly frightened, would have made her escape, if the boy had not held her fast.

"Papa, papa, it's all explained. Charlie didn't let Pooney out. It was Anne did it—quite by accident, and she has been afraid to say so."

Mr. Oliver dropped his uplifted arm, but did not relax his hold on Charlie's collar. He had a suspicion that this evidence had been got up to save the delinquent from the just punishment of his stubbornness. "Come here, Anne,"

he said. "How could you have let this creature out? The door of its hutch can only be opened by pressing a very peculiar spring. No one has taught you how to open that, I suppose?"

"No, sir, I knows nothing of no spring. But yesterday morning, in pulling open the casement, I happened to knock down the small table on which the hutch stands. I don't know how it was, I am sure, sir, but the door of the box somehow came open; and the man-be-goose, or whatever it's called, jumped over the window-sill and ran into the garden. I was afraid I should be scolded terrible if Mrs. Jenkins come to hear it, so I shut the box up again and put it on the table, and then went and told Master Poole what had happened. I thought he'd be sure to find it, and he would know how to put it back into the box. And so he did find it, sir, in the hollow under the summer-house, yesterday afternoon, for he come in and showed it me, and said where he'd found it."

"And why didn't you tell me this before, Anne?"

"Please, sir, Master Poole told me to say nothing about it."

"Very well, you may go; only another time always tell when you have had any accident. Charlie," he resumed, turning to the boy, who had not moved a muscle all this time, "I am sorry for the mistake that has been made, but I still think half the fault, at least, is yours."

"You doubted my word," once more repeated Charlie.

"You have said that several times, and I thought it mere boyish impertinence. When did I doubt your word?"

"I told you I was sure my father meant Pooney to belong to me as well as Harry, and neither of you would believe me."

"I thought you were mistaken, not that you were speaking falsely, and I have no doubt so did Harry. When you are older you will learn that no gentleman ever doubts another gentleman's word. Learn to control that proud temper of yours, my boy, or it will get you into a thousand troubles, worse by a great deal than this."

CHAPTER II.

FIVE or six years passed away after the occurrence related in the last chapter, without any remarkable incident; unless, indeed, the decease of the mangoost—which, unhappily, made its escape one fine day and was caught in a rabbit-trap, to the sore distress of the boys—could be so accounted. The three friends continued to increase in strength and stature, becoming every year more inseparable, until the two elder had reached an age when home rule, however judicious, ceased to be desirable. One evening, after a joyous cricket party at the Vicarage, Mr. Oliver and his host had an anxious consultation as to what ought now to be done with Charlie and Harry.

"They are as good lads as ever lived," said the lieutenant. "Charlie will turn out a fine fellow one of these days; but he needs the society of older boys, who will be more than his match. He has his own way here too completely. And Harry must be taught to rely on himself, rather than on his friend."

"You are right," said Mr. Locke. "It is very beautiful to see the friendship between them, which is as single-hearted and unselfish as anything I have ever witnessed, and so is their tenderness for my Herbie. But they all need a wider sphere of action. I feel that every day more plainly."

"The question is, where are they to go?" said Mr. Oliver.

"Why not send Charlie and Harry to one of our large public schools?" suggested the clergyman.

"Well, I wanted to know what you would say about that, Locke. Are you a public school man yourself? My father would not send me to one. I was educated partly at home, and partly at a private tutor's."

"I can hardly call myself a public school man," replied the vicar. "I was at a largish school until I was sixteen, when I was taken away on account of ill health, and after remaining two years or so at home, was sent to the University. But though the school contained two hundred boys, and many of them were seventeen and eighteen years old, what is called the monitorial or public school system did not exist there."

"Ah, that public school system," said Mr. Oliver; "I was in hopes you would have been able to tell me something more about it than I know. I confess I have a great prejudice against it, and am most unwilling to put Charlie and Harry under it. But then my knowledge on the subject is very limited."

"I know something about it," observed Mr. Locke. "I had friends at Oxford who had been at public schools—at Harchester, and Winborough, and Ruggenham, and Westonbury, and I heard much of their school life from them. What is your complaint against it?"

"Oh, the power put into one boy's hands, which enables him to oppress another with impunity. Few men are fit to be trusted with power, Locke. How can you expect a boy to be so?"

"My dear Oliver, you forget that Dame Nature herself trusts boys with power, and you can't help her doing so."

"I don't understand you."

"You don't? Why, what is power? Superior strength, capacity, position in the world. Look at the boys in any large school. There are some, whose physical strength makes them the absolute masters of others; some, whose superior cleverness enables them to lead the rest whithersoever they please; some, whose greater command of money, longer experience of school life, more daring courage, and the like, render them the idols of the common herd. What is this but power, and power especially liable to abuse in a large school?"

"Yes, of course in those respects a school is but an image of the great world. But why need the evil be heightened by arbitrarily subjecting one boy to another's authority, on pain of the heaviest punishment if he refuses to obey?"

"Public school men say that the evil is not heightened, but, on the contrary, much diminished, by giving authority to the senior boys. They would tell you that bullying, for instance, can only be put down by monitorial power. There was certainly plenty of bullying at my school, where, as I told you, there were no monitors."

"Put down!" exclaimed the lieutenant in great surprise; "I have always connected the monitorial system, as it is called, with unrestrained and monstrous bullying. Why, have you ever heard me speak of Gifford of ours?"

"I think I have; the poor fellow who was killed in the same action in which you were wounded."

"Yes. Well, I ought to say that my chief information about public schools was derived from him. He and I went out in the same ship, and became tolerably intimate during the voyage. He had been educated at Harchester; from which he had persuaded his father to remove him about a year previously, in consequence of the brutal usage he had received from one of the monitors—one Wilde, I remember. Indeed, it was not very likely I should forget it, for I hardly ever had a conversation with Gifford, in which the name was not brought up by him. He was, I believe, truthful enough; but if the half of what he told me was true, I should be very sorry to send a lad to any school where such things were possible."

"As what things?" asked Mr. Locke.

"Well, Locke, I really should not like to tell you, old friends as we are. A great deal consisted of coarse insults, which would not bear repetition; enough to make a man's blood boil to hear of, and any man's blood to boil *over*, who had endured them like poor Gifford."

"What came of it? Did he and his tyrant ever meet again?"

"Unhappily, yes. We had been about a twelvemonth at Madras, when the —th regiment was moved there; and among the juniors of its mess, Gifford recognized young Wilde."

"He cut him dead, I suppose?"

"I wish he had been content with that. No, he watched his opportunity to insult him in public in a manner so flagrant, that the affair could have but one termination. They

met next day at daybreak, and Gifford's first ball passed through his enemy's brain."

"How dreadful!" said Mr. Locke.

"Yes, the whole affair was dreadful throughout. Poor Gifford repented too late, and never held up his head again. The Burmese marksman, who shot him through the heart, did him a service!"

"Well, Oliver, that's a shocking story, but remember such things can't often happen, or we should hear more on the subject. I tell you what will be the best thing to do. Write to Colonel Poole, and tell him Charlie must be sent somewhere to school, and you want to know where. I have no doubt he'll ask General Sydenham's advice about it; ndeed, you may suggest that if you like it. I happen to know something of the general."

"And so do I, Locke; and there's no man whose opinion on this matter I would so willingly follow. I'll go home and write at once."

It took months in those times to get an answer from Delhi, where Poole was then stationed. During the interim an incident took place, which had a considerable influence on the characters of the chief actors in this tale. Poole and Oliver had early been taught to swim by one Obadiah Stubbs, an old fisherman, whose invincible good-nature on all occasions had made him a great favourite; and they had at last attained such proficiency, that the lieutenant gave them the long-desired permission to bathe in the open bay, if accompanied by Stubbs. On the day after the bestowal of this privilege, they set out for Obadiah's cottage, accom-

panied by Locke; who, being no swimmer, had simply the part of a looker-on assigned him.

They found the old man seated in his boat, which he was baling out, and he signified his assent to the proposed expedition after his usual fashion—that is, by nodding his head, he being a man of singularly scant speech. At another time they might have thought his manner strange, but they were now too eager to think about anything but their approaching bathe. They put off from shore, Poole and Oliver rowing and Locke steering, while old Stubbs sat in his corner. In this manner the spot agreed upon was reached. Then the boys threw out the anchor and undressed; Harry plunged in, and Charlie followed him; but on again rising to the surface, found he had been carried to a long distance from the boat by the tide, which was running out with great force. He did contrive, however, to swim against it, fighting his way to the boat, as it were inch by inch. After ten minutes of severe exertion he succeeded, and was just laying his hand on the lowest step of the ladder, when he heard a cry behind him. Looking round, he saw Harry Oliver a yard or two farther off, struggling with all his might against the tide, but so evidently exhausted, that it was more than doubtful whether he could accomplish the remaining distance.

"Hullo, Obadiah," he shouted with all the lungs he had left. "Get up the anchor, and go to pick up Harry. He is regularly blown and can't fetch the boat. What is the matter with him, Herbie?" he added a minute or so afterwards; "is he asleep, or what?"

"He must be drunk, I think," replied Locke; "I have

been trying to rouse him up ever since I saw the difficulty you were in. But he only sits and smiles, and doesn't speak a word. I can't manage the boat alone, I am afraid."

"Pitch that rope out to Harry," said Poole; "you will have strength enough to pull him up to the boat, and then we can hoist him in between us."

Herbert promptly obeyed, and Harry catching the line with all the readiness of a drowning man, was presently brought to the foot of the ladder, up which he was forced by the strenuous exertions of his companions, sinking in a swoon of exhaustion on the bottom of the boat immediately afterwards. But he was no sooner safely landed than a still worse misfortune occurred. The shock of Harry's fall knocked Herbert backwards; and before he could catch at anything to right himself, he went over the side of the boat into the water. He rose immediately to the surface, but was swept away helplessly by the tide, which was now nearly at its strongest. Charlie's first idea was to scramble into the boat, pull up the anchor, and row after him. But a moment's thought convinced him that this must be useless. Herbert would be lost before the anchor could be hauled in. He must swim after him, and try to bring him back to the boat. It was a poor chance, but it was the only one. He let go his hold on the ladder and struck out for the spot where Herbert was struggling helplessly to keep above water. A few seconds brought him to his side. "Don't catch hold of me, Herbie," he cried, as the latter stretched out his hands to him. "That would do for us both. Put your hands on my shoulders, and I'll try if I can swim back."

Locke obeyed in silence. He placed his hands as directed, and Charlie striking out with all his force, endeavoured to regain the boat, which now lay at a most formidable distance from them. For a few minutes he held his own, and even seemed to be making some slight progress; but the task was too much for his strength. He began gradually to lose ground. He was obliged after every half-dozen strokes to stop for a moment to draw breath, and on each of these occasions he was swept farther and farther out. Presently he heard Herbert's voice, very faint and weak, but speaking with all the boy's customary calmness. "Charlie, it 's quite plain that you can't save both yourself and me, and if you go on with this much longer, you won't be able to save yourself. I am just going to let go. Good bye, and God bless you, Charlie. Give my love to my father and mother."

"No, no. Don't do that, Herbie," cried Poole; "we 'll sink or swim together." He renewed his efforts, though with no better success than before; still, however, entreating his companion to hold on. The latter complied, or rather did not carry out his first intention, having by this become almost insensible. A few minutes must now have ended the lives of both. But just as Charlie was beginning to feel his strength wholly fail him, his knee struck against some obstacle not more than a foot or so under water. He suddenly remembered that there was a small reef, somewhere in that part of the bay, to which the fishermen gave the fanciful name of "the Harrow," and which at low water was several feet above the level of the tide. Doubtless they had been carried thither. Inwardly thanking God for this un-

expected deliverance, he staggered on to the highest point of the shelf which he could find, and there sat down, supported Locke's head, who had now swooned from exhaustion, in his lap.

By this time Harry had recovered from his temporary exhaustion, and looking anxiously round to learn what had become of his friends, saw them at some distance, lying, to all appearance, helpless on the water. A good deal alarmed, he called to old Stubbs to go to their rescue. But Obadiah still remained motionless in his seat, and it suddenly flashed upon Oliver that he had heard from the fishermen, that the old man was sometimes given to take an inordinate quantity of beer; on which occasions he would continue to all appearance as sober as a teetotaller, but in reality quite unconscious of what was passing. No doubt this must have been the case in the present instance; and he had allowed Charlie and himself to bathe, at a time when the tide was running out with a strength to which none but a most powerful swimmer could offer successful resistance. Obadiah, therefore, could render no help, and if his friends were to be saved, it must be by his own exertions. There was no time to get up the anchor. He ran to his jacket, took out his pocket knife, and cut the rope. Then taking up an oar, he contrived to steer the boat as it drifted, until it grounded upon the reef where the boys were lying. By his and Poole's joint exertion, Herbert was helped into the boat; Charlie followed, and the two lads had just sufficient strength left to row the boat ashore.

Stubbs retained his original attitude with unimpaired

gravity throughout the whole affair; but his wife, who had been aware of his condition, and was a good deal alarmed at discovering the absence of the boat, was on the look-out for its return. Herbert was conveyed to her cottage, and in the course of two hours or so was sufficiently recovered to accompany the others home. Old Dame Stubbs implored and entreated the young gentlemen to maintain silence respecting her husband's delinquency.

"It will be the ruin of him," she said, "if it comes to parson's ears."

They consented, and the truth was never divulged during old Stubbs's lifetime. But from that day Poole regarded Herbert Locke with a different feeling from that which he had before entertained towards him. He had hitherto thought him a pleasant-tempered, quiet little fellow, whose good-nature made him an agreeable companion. But he now saw in him qualities far higher than he himself pos sessed; and though he still continued his protection of him, there was always a feeling of respect mingled with it.

In due course of post arrived the answer from India. Colonel Poole entirely approved of the boys being sent to a public school, and named Westonbury as the one which he was inclined, for several reasons, to prefer to the others. General Sydenham, who chanced to be at Delhi when the lieutenant's letter was received, was an old Westonbury man, and a warm personal friend of Dr. Formby, the head master. Moreover, Arthur Sydenham, the general's youngest son, was now in the sixth form of the school above-mentioned, and his good offices would be enlisted in behalf of Charlie and Harry.

"They say that Arthur is the exact reproduction of his father at the same age," wrote Colonel Poole; "and if so, I am sure our boys could not have a better friend. You will remember how fond the general used to be of discoursing about public schools, and how well he understands them. He has written by the same post which brings this letter, to Dr. Formby, asking him to receive the boys as early as he can at Westonbury, and place them in the boarding-house of which he has the highest opinion. The Doctor will, no doubt, write to you to say when there will be vacancies. Give my love to my Charlie. I try to fancy what he is like from your description. I am thankful to find that you can speak so well of him."

General Sydenham's letter to his old schoolfellow and brother monitor travelled to Westonbury without passing through Mr. Oliver's hands; but we shall take the privilege of the author to give its contents in full, as bearing on the subject of the story—also Dr. Formby's reply:

"DELHI, *June* 16, 18—.

"MY DEAR FORMBY,—*Fugaces labuntur anni!* I suppose that is the first thought always that comes into a man's head when he takes up his pen to address an old friend after several years' silence; and it must now be five or six since I wrote to ask you to receive Arthur at Westonbury, and had your kind answer. The lad has thriven there, they tell me, and his own letters are all that I could desire. I seem to hear the old cathedral chimes as I read them, or to be breathing the fresh air of Lyndmere, or lying under the elms

of the cricket-field, as we were wont to do in the last year of our school life, discussing that *vexata quæstio*, about which we could never agree—the monitorial system. I wonder whether we should agree about it now, when each of us has had the experience of nearly forty years of active life to enlighten him! At fifty-seven, I think, in the main, nearly the same that I did in those days, though the grounds on which my conclusions rest have (I need not tell you) undergone much alteration.

"The career of a soldier is not a bad one, you will allow, for forming an opinion on the subject of discipline; but the life of an *Indian* soldier is particularly serviceable in that respect. The relation between European officers and native soldiers in many particulars resembles that of boys and their masters. There is the same reticence, the same community of feeling, the same disposition to fancy themselves misunderstood and wronged on the part of those under authority; and there is, again, the same difficulty of comprehending the real feelings of their subordinates, and therefore of exercising effectual influence, on the part of those wielding it. It is only through the native non-commissioned officers that we can really get at the men at all; and if ever the time should come when these were wholly alienated from us, I should tremble, not only for our Indian empire, but for all our lives.

"Holding, as I have said, the same to be true, in its degree, of masters and boys at a public school, I feel the imperative necessity of maintaining the monitorial system in them—of giving the sixth form, that is, power to control the others, to call them to account for breaches of school disci-

pline, for bullying, and gross moral offences, and to enforce their interference by the use of the stick, when needed. I am also for severely punishing, even by immediate expulsion, any outrage or violence offered to them. But I still think that the power entrusted to monitors in my day was too absolute and lawless, and that the consequences of the system were injurious both to juniors and monitors, but especially to the latter.

"I am curious to know whether any of the modifications for which I was wont to plead, or anything akin to them, have been introduced at Westonbury during your head-mastership. You used to be a strenuous advocate for the existing *régime*, and held that any meddling with it might possibly do a certain amount of good, but would certainly do more evil. Do you still think so, Formby? If you can spare the time, do tell me what is your opinion now on our old topic.

"It has just occurred to me that I have been all this time writing about my own fancies, and have overlooked the real matter I have in hand. I want you to take two boys (age between thirteen and fourteen), as soon as you can find room for them—in the boarding-house which you would prefer for a boy of your own, if you were going to place one in the school. One of the lads is Charlie Poole, my great-nephew, and the other, young Oliver, the son of my nephew's dearest friend. I should like them to be received at Westonbury, if possible, before Arthur leaves. If you can manage this for me, I shall be most thankful.

"And now, farewell, my old and tried friend of so many

years. *Cælum non animum mutant* is true of me, if it ever was of any man; and in nothing am I less changed than my regard for you.

"Ever yours,

"CHARLES SYDENHAM."

The answer arrived at Delhi a few months afterwards:

"WESTONBURY, *Oct.* 11, 18—.

"MY DEAR SYDENHAM,—Your letter was a most welcome surprise. Believe me, however fresh your remembrance of our boyish days may be, mine is not less so. You may think, perhaps, that living, as I do, within the old walls—scarcely having left them, indeed, since I returned here as a junior master in my twenty-second year—beholding the same familiar scenes day after day, and hearing the old familiar words, I find but little difference between the past and the present. Ah, Sydenham, that is not so! The Westonbury of to-day is not the Westonbury of our boyhood; it is only its ghost! I take my evening walk in summer on the banks of Earlsmere, and am sometimes ferried over, for old recollection's sake, to the 'Earl's Refuge,' and sit and muse awhile in the old ruin; but it is not the same lake on which we rowed the two-oar race, and you and I came in first, to the great glory of our house! I remember how the roofless walls rang again to the triumphant shouts that proclaimed our victory. Sydenham, have you ever known a triumph like that?

"Aye, and I remember, too, our controversy about the power of the monitors, and your arguments are fresh as ever

in my recollection. It will interest you to hear that some modification *has* been made in the old system, and I think you would approve of it, though it falls far short of your requirements. A kind of council was established some ten years ago, consisting of the five head monitors, which can control the authority of the others so far, that they can rescind or forbid any act of an individual monitor. The enactment was made in their interest, rather than in that of the juniors; still it gives—what you used to plead for—a junior, threatened with a thrashing, a right of appeal before undergoing it. It affords, in some degree, an illustration of the arguments I used to advance to you. The new law has been in force for several years, and I do not think that any single boy has ever escaped through it a thrashing which he would otherwise have had! From all I can learn, the boys do not very often resort to it, and when they do, the decision of the council is almost invariably with the monitor.

"I do not doubt, however, you will say that, without the other alterations for which you used to plead, you are not surprised that the 'council' is found to be of little efficacy. The two main points on which you used to insist (if my memory serves right) were, first, that no monitor should be allowed to give any junior a thrashing for an offence committed against himself; and, secondly (your *cheval de bataille*), that every thrashing should be reported, immediately afterwards, by the head monitor to the authorities.

"I used to be opposed to both these changes, I well remember, and particularly to the last-named. I thought that any such report given by a monitor, would be given reluc-

tantly, and with such a bias as to deprive it of all value, and that there would always be the greatest risk of its being withheld in just the very cases where it was most needed; in fact, that it was so directly opposed to all that a schoolboy clings to most pertinaciously, that it would be found impossible to work such a system with any success. But I am bound to say that my opinions have undergone a good deal of fluctuation on this subject, especially of late; and though I cannot see my way to the introduction of your regulations, I own I sometimes wish they were in force.

"Like yourself, in the interest of our old discussions I have forgotten the principal object of your letter. I will give the earliest vacancies which may fall, after the fulfilment of existing promises, to young Poole and Oliver, and will place them, if possible, in Mr. Marsh's house, which contains, on the whole, the best set of boys at the present time.

"Ever, my dear Sydenham, yours affectionately,

"WALTER FORMBY."

CHAPTER III.

COLONEL POOLE'S choice of Westonbury was duly reported by Mr. Oliver to his two pupils, and produced, as might be expected, a great sensation in their minds. Eager inquiries were instantly set on foot as to everything connected with the school in question, which as yet they only knew by name, among half a dozen other of the great English public schools. They learned that Westonbury lay about eighty or ninety miles to the north-east of their present abode, that it was a cathedral town, and had once been a place of great importance, but had now been outstripped, in respect of population and wealth, by other towns in its vicinity; though it still numbered some ten or twelve thousand inhabitants. It was situated on the banks of a small river called the Lynde, which was not wide or deep enough for navigation; but within a mile or two of the town it widened into two small lakes, one of which afforded the boys an expanse of water on which they could row and sail, as well as many good bathing-places. The school itself was an old foundation, possessed of large revenues, and an ancient pile of buildings, greatly admired by all lovers of antiquity. Of late years boarding-houses had been built, six in number, each of which contained from sixty to seventy boys, so that the school was large, though not among the largest of the public schools. It bore a very high reputation at the Universities, both for the scholarship and gentle-

manly behaviour of those educated at it. It was in consequence much in request, and when Dr. Formby wrote to Lieutenant Oliver, in compliance with General Sydenham's request, to notify to him his willingness to receive the boys, he intimated also that he feared it would be some considerable time before he could give them vacancies.

This letter for the time greatly troubled the boys. Having once taken in the idea that Westonbury was the school to which they were to be consigned, they became, boylike, full of eagerness to enter upon the new world thus opened to them. Throughout the whole of the Christmas holidays they every day scrutinized the contents of the post-bag, in the hope of finding a letter with the Westonbury post-mark. But December passed away, and the first fortnight of January, without the arrival of any such letter, and they were just on the point of abandoning all hope for that half-year, when, one bright morning, the long-desired epistle made its appearance, announcing that two vacancies had unexpectedly occurred at the Rev. Mr. Marsh's boarding-house, to which Charles Poole and Henry Oliver had been nominated. The school would re-open on the 28th of January, on which day it was requested they would present themselves for admission.

Preparations were now made in earnest. Wardrobes were refitted; books, bats, and all other treasures appertaining to boys, carefully packed, and places taken at Binford by the "Highflyer," a fast coach which, three times a week, performed the distance to Westonbury in something under ten hours. Unfortunately, the lieutenant was unable to accompany them, a severe attack of neuralgia, one of the conse-

quences of his wound, having confined him to his bed. But the two boys were in no way out of heart at the prospect of essaying the journey alone. To say the truth, had it not been for their regret on Mr. Oliver's account, they rather liked the notion, as being a sort of indication of the new dignity which was about to appertain to them as members of Westonbury College.

It was a dark and cold morning when they started in a spring-cart belonging to Mr. Locke, and driven by his man-of-all-work, to Binford, which, as the reader has heard, lay at the distance of about nine miles from Barstone. The "Highflyer" started thence about seven in the morning, usually reaching Westonbury at five in the afternoon. Notwithstanding the unpromising appearance of the day, the boys were in great spirits. They were to breakfast at Stoverton and dine at Gorchester, and then in a few hours they would attain the goal of their hopes. The stage-coach journey was in itself so complete a novelty to boys who had hardly ever left their small sea-side village, as to present a series of delights independently altogether of its anticipated termination. Truth to say, notwithstanding the many *désagréments* of a coach journey in the olden times—the slow rate of progression, the exposure to cold in winter and heat in summer; notwithstanding the cold winds by which one was occasionally pierced to the bone, and the downpours of rain by which one was soaked to the skin; notwithstanding the bad tobacco that was wont to be puffed in one's face, and the tricklings from old women's umbrellas that inevitably made their way between one's neck and collar—there was

much genuine and thorough enjoyment in the old coach journey. It was a stirring sight to see the four fine horses, full of life and spirit, rattling along the macadamized road; to hear the ringing sound of the hoofs, the jingling of the harness, and anon the guard's cheery horn; to feel the fresh air blowing in your face, and catch the sweet scent of a thousand fields and gardens. The halts, too, at the roadside inns; the fresh horses brought out; the brief colloquy with the ostlers; the chance companionship round the inn table at breakfast or dinner; the interchange of news and compliments with the host and hostess; even the guard's stock anecdotes and threadbare jokes had their charms; and few who can remember these things, now wholly things of the past, do so without something of a sigh. Yet it may be that it needed the freshness of youth to appreciate the delights above-mentioned, and were they to be renewed now, in the decline of our autumn, they might present a very different appearance.

At all events, our young friends found them full of enjoyment, and when they alighted in front of the "King's Arms" at Binford, and took leave of old Daniel, charging him with all kinds of messages to their friends at Barstone, there were not two happier lads to be found on the face of the earth. Charlie Poole hurried into the coach-office to secure, if possible, the box-seat, to be alternately occupied by himself and Harry. Finding it happily still vacant, he disbursed the sum of half a crown to the booking clerk, in consideration of which "box-seat" was formally annexed to his name in the way-bill. The porter, at the same time, undertook to

secure Harry a front place immediately behind his friend, "so that the two gentlemen might sit together;" in requital of which service a further shilling was bestowed. These two sums together made somewhat of a hole in the slender finances of the lads; but then it would have been "caddish" for public school boys to give sixpences!

The preliminaries had hardly been arranged, when the "Highflyer" made its appearance, almost empty at this point of the journey, and rendering the fulfilment of the booking clerk's and porter's promises sufficiently easy. Our heroes, however, entertained no suspicion that their money had been needlessly expended, but mounted cheerily to their places, and in a few minutes more were rolling at a smart trot along the road to Westonbury.

At Stoverton, eighteen miles off, the coach stopped to breakfast, and on resuming their places after the meal, the boys found a new passenger in front, whose appearance somewhat puzzled them. He was so muffled in wraps that it was difficult to distinguish his figure. He had on a large travelling cap, which covered not his head only, but his cheeks and chin; and he wore a large pair of spectacles of a greenish hue. The boys stared at him in evident perplexity, of which, however, he took no notice. Charlie could not make up his mind whether he was a bagman or a Methodist preacher, though, from the extreme gravity of his deportment, he was inclined to suppose the latter; but his attention was soon attracted to other matters, and he would have forgotten all about his fellow-passenger, if the latter had not suddenly addressed him.

"Can you tell me, young gentleman," he said, in a weak, tremulous voice, "what may be the distance to Westonbury?"

"I believe about sixty miles," answered Poole, rather distantly, for the appellative "young gentleman" did not please him. "But," he added, "I am not sure, for I have never been this road before."

"Ah, indeed? then, perhaps, you are now going to be placed, for the first time, under the care of the Rev. Dr. Formby?"

"We belong to Westonbury College," was the reply, curter even than before.

"Yes, that is the Rev. Dr. Formby's establishment. I had heard that his seminary re-opens to-day.

'Sed vos qui tandem, quibus aut venistis ab oris?'

as Virgil says in the First Æneid. Doubtless you have received a classical education sufficiently to understand me. Do you come from Walminster, or Binford, or Milhampton?"

"We don't come from any of them," answered Charlie, in a tone which he thought would effectually put an extinguisher upon his questioner.

"From none of the three?" repeated the latter. "Why, then, your place of residence must be Stoverton or its neighbourhood; in which case, of course, I must feel all the greater interest in you. Shall I tell them?" he continued, apparently talking to himself, but still in a tone which was plainly distinguishable. "It would be a kind act, and if I were at their age, I should be thankful to learn it. May I

ask, sir," he again said, this time addressing Oliver, "of which of the boarding-houses you are to be an inmate?"

"We are going to Mr. Marsh's," replied Oliver, whose curiosity had been a good deal excited by the dialogue between the stranger and Charlie. "Do you know it?"

"Yes," replied their new companion with a groan. "I know it well.

'Quis genus Æneadum, quis Trojæ nesciat urbem?'

as Virgil says in the First Æneid. Oh that I could add 'virtutesque,' as he does. But what am I saying?" he added quickly, talking to himself as before. "It would be better to say nothing. It might get me into trouble, and they will learn soon enough. No," he pursued, resuming his former tone; "I know nothing about Dr. Formby or Mr. Marsh worth your knowing. Dr. Formby is——a clergyman of the Church of England, and Mr. Marsh has never—— been actually convicted of any immorality, and no one has a right to speak of him as though he had been. The case was dismissed by the magistrates, the majority of whom were of opinion that there was no sufficient proof."

"Offence! the magistrates! no sufficient proof!" repeated Harry, in a tone of bewilderment. "Do you mean that Mr. Marsh was tried upon some charge before a bench of magistrates, or what?"

"I was confounding the two cases together," replied the stranger. "It was for cruelty, not for intoxication, that Dr. Formby was indicted; and the magistrates did not say that there was no proof—I was wrong there; but that they did

not think it was a case to send to the assizes. He was only severely fined and cautioned. But of course you saw the case in the papers?"

"We never heard a word about it," exclaimed Harry. "I am sure if my father——"

"What, don't you see the 'Northern Times,' or the 'Midland Counties Examiner'?"

"We seldom see anything but the 'Binford Herald,'" replied Harry.

"Ah, that accounts for it," remarked their friend. "And I ought to add, as so much has been said, that most people were of opinion that Dr. Formby was too severely handled by the press. The boy's back did *not* mortify, you know, after all, and he has since recovered sufficiently to be taken to the sea-side for change of air, and there is no need for you to be uneasy. Dr. Formby has had such a lesson, that you may be assured he will not be guilty of undue violence again."

"But you said, sir," cried Oliver, "at least I think you said, something about Mr. Marsh too."

"Did I say anything about him?" said their friend, again talking to himself. "Surely I could not have been so indiscreet. And yet it is a bad case—always out at taverns at night; that inflamed face; alas!

'impiger haurit
Spumantem pateram, et pleno se proluit auro,'

as Virgil says. My dear young gentleman," he resumed, "you will of course treat Mr. Marsh with respect, and obey

his orders, but be careful to avoid his example. Habitual intemperance is a terrible thing, especially in one—but I really must say no more." He wrapped himself in his cloak and relapsed into silence, which he could not again be induced to break.

The boys also subsided into a reverie, and the next two stages were accomplished almost without the exchange of a word. At Gorchester the coach stopped to dinner; and the boys, descending from their seats, made their way into the parlour of the "Wheatsheaf," and sat down to their repast. Their new-made acquaintance did not follow them, and the other passengers preferred taking their refreshment in the bar. The boys, therefore, had an opportunity of discussing, without restraint, the very strange and unwelcome information which they had just obtained.

"We mustn't take for granted what this fellow says," observed Poole. "He very likely may have some quarrel with Dr. Formby and Mr. Marsh. I half suspect he is a dissenting preacher, and they always spite the clergy. We don't know the least who he is, remember."

"That's true," said Harry; "but a fellow would hardly venture to talk in that way in a public conveyance, if he wasn't tolerably sure of his facts. Besides, the coachman didn't contradict him. I observed him listening with all his ears, and once or twice he turned away his face, as if it was unpleasant to him to hear it, though he couldn't deny it. I am sure the coachman knows him. I saw him touch his hat to him, when he got on the coach at Stoverton."

"I think the best thing will be," suggested Charlie, "to

write to your father as soon as we get to Westonbury, and tell him what we have heard. He will know what to do, of course."

"I think we ought to make some inquiries first," answered Oliver. "My father would be awfully angry if it should turn out that some enemy of the school has been telling a lot of lies about the masters there. If the coachman knows him, he can of course tell us who he is, and then we can easily ascertain in Westonbury (where it is plain enough that he lives), whether he is a person whose word can be relied on. It's worst about Mr. Marsh. If he really is a fellow who is in the habit of getting drunk, I am sure we should be both taken away at once."

After a long consultation it was agreed that as soon as they had done dinner, they should go out and have a private talk with the coachman, whose name they had by this time ascertained to be Tom Brindley. But on emerging from the coffee-room for this purpose, they beheld a sight which drove all thought of their spectacled friend and his disclosures out of their minds. A tall, strong, dark-looking lad, some three or perhaps four years older than Poole, was standing on the wheel, arranging his wraps on the box-seat. He had removed Poole's coat, and had placed it on the seat behind, next to Harry's. The sight immediately awoke Charlie's ire.

"Hallo, I say," he shouted, "just leave that coat alone, will you? and come down from the box-seat. I paid for it this morning at Binford, and I and my friend have occupied it ever since."

"Then you and your friend have had it long enough,"

observed the new-comer coolly; "and it's quite time you gave it up. I always have the box-seat when I travel this way. Tom Brindley and every one here knows that. You, I judge, are quite a stranger on the road."

"Stranger or not," cried Charlie angrily, "I paid half a crown to the bookkeeper at Binford for it."

"Did you?" said the other; "the more flat you, then. The next time you go to Binford, I advise you to get the half-crown back if you can. But that is nothing to me. This is my seat, and I mean to keep it."

"We'll see about that," rejoined Charlie, whose wrath was now roused to the uttermost by the older boy's contemptuous manner. "Here, coachman, guard, ostler! this fellow has got my place. I insist on his giving it up."

The coachman had just emerged from the bar, where he had partaken of a repast greatly to his satisfaction. He looked dubiously at the new occupant of the box-seat and then glanced at Charlie. "Well, Mr. Parsons," he said at last, "this gentleman, no doubt, has had the seat all the way from Binford. There's no denying of that."

"There's no need for denying it, that I know of," returned Parsons carelessly. "The question now before us is not about the box-seat between Binford and Gorchester, but the box-seat between Gorchester and Westonbury, and you know quite well that I always have that."

"Well, you do mostly, Mr. Parsons," replied Mr. Brindley, who was unwilling to offend the new-comer, but was quite aware that the right lay with the former occupant. "You do have it when you comes this road, that's certain. I dare

say the young gent here won't object to your having it the rest of the way to-day."

"I shall, though," cried Charlie. "If he had spoken civilly, and asked it as a favour, I might have allowed it; but I certainly shan't after what he has said. I insist upon his getting out of the seat, which I have paid for."

"You had better try to turn me out," observed Parsons, with a sneer.

"And so I will," shouted Charlie. "You'll help me, won't you, Harry?" he continued, turning to Oliver. "He is bigger and stronger than I am, or I wouldn't ask any one's help."

"I'll back you, Charlie, never fear," returned Oliver: "you get up on one side, and I on the other, and we'll have him out of it in a jiffey."

"All right, Harry," said Poole, springing on to the wheel, while Oliver mounted to the coachman's seat. Parsons was vigorously collared on both sides at the same moment, and before he was prepared for the assault. He struck furiously out, but without damaging his opponents; his own exertions helped to dislodge him; and after a short grapple all three boys came to the ground together, rolling and tumbling over each other. The horses, which had just been led out of the inn yard, plunged and kicked, and were with difficulty quieted; and a crowd began to gather round the coach. But it was before the days of country police, and the spectators showed no disposition to interfere.

The fray had thus far been favourable to the assailants, but only through good luck. The superiority of strength

and weight on the other side were too great to be long kept under. Parsons sprang up from the pavement, upon which he had been roughly thrown, boiling with rage and pain. He rushed straight at Charlie, who defended himself as well as he was able, while his companion attempted a diversion in the rear. But this would have been of little avail. Both boys in all likelihood, but certainly Poole, would have received some severe punishment, but for an unexpected interference.

A lad apparently seventeen, or perhaps eighteen, years of age, with a handsome face, and a slight but active figure, was riding down the High Street, and had approached within twenty yards of the door of the "Wheatsheaf," when the *fracas* began. He drew rein opposite the entrance to the inn yard, and looked with some interest at the belligerents, who at that moment had just regained their legs after their fall. It seemed that, to his own surprise, he recognized one of them.

"What, Parsons!" he exclaimed, "is that you? Why, what is all this about?"

The boy named started as he heard the voice, and looked hastily round him. As his eye lighted on the face of the horseman, a strange change seemed to pass over him. The swagger, which had hitherto been so conspicuous, was quite laid aside. He seemed to shrink into himself, and answered the question put to him in a nervous, hurried manner, which formed a curious contrast to his recent demeanour.

"It is nothing, thank you," he said; "an accident, only an accident." Then adding something in a still more con-

fused manner about washing his face and hands, he hurried out of sight into the inn. Charlie and Harry, delivered from their enemy, shook off the traces of the combat, and mounted in triumph to their seats; while the rider, after a keen glance at the boys, rode quietly off.

In a few minutes more the coach was ready to start, and a messenger was sent in to summon Parsons, who made his reappearance quite crestfallen, and took his place at the back of the coach. Their spectacled friend did not resume his seat; and on inquiring after him, the boys were informed that he had got inside, his nerves being unequal to witnessing any disturbance. The remainder of the journey, a little under twenty miles, was accomplished in rather more than two hours, at the end of which time the coachman broke the silence which he had preserved since leaving Gorchester, to point out to his two passengers the various localities of their new school.

They were just on the top of a rising ground, known as Lyndford Hill, and Westonbury and its environs lay spread out like a map at their feet.

"There's the cathedral, young gents," he said, "and a little to the right them houses with a grey stone wall round them, and the old building near 'em is the college. They green meadows is the playing-fields, where the gents plays cricket and football. There runs the river, and there's the two lakes they calls Earlsmere and Lyndmere. The first is where the school is allowed to row and bathe. The t'other's in the Earl's Park, and going there's made a favour on. That's Westonbury Castle out there, three or four miles

away. This here's the High Street, and yonder is the 'Lyndford Arms,' where the coach stops."

The boys took in his words eagerly enough. They knew something of the place already, through General Sydenham's description of it; and the various objects pointed out to them seemed to have something of the interest of old associations. As the coach rolled along the stones of the High Street, they passed a great number of boys, some of the same age, but most of them older than themselves, by whom their fellow-traveller was repeatedly recognized; making Charlie and his companion aware of the very unwelcome fact, which they had, however, before suspected—that the person with whom they had had the squabble in the street at Gorchester, was one of their own schoolfellows.

This, however, could not now be helped, and the new objects of interest, which presented themselves on all sides, soon drove the feeling of annoyance from their minds. Being, happily for themselves, ignorant of the Westonbury etiquette, which imperatively required that none of the boys should present themselves at their boarding-houses before nine o'clock, however bored or wearied they might feel, our heroes gave their luggage into the charge of the porter, and requested him to guide them to the house of the Rev. Mr. Marsh. The man complied. He conducted them down one or two narrow alleys, across the cathedral yard, and through the college gate, stopping at a large house some twenty yards or so from it. Here he rang the bell, and presently a short, square-looking man, whom the porter addressed as "Jem," made his appearance in acknowledgment of the

summons. Having heard our heroes' names, he informed them that they were expected, and that Mrs. Marsh had given orders for them when they arrived to be asked to take supper with her in the dining-room, as Mr. Marsh was not at home that evening. The boys glanced at one another uncomfortably at this information, and Harry asked hesitatingly, "Whether Mr. Marsh was often out of an evening?"

The servant stared hard at the boy as he heard the question, and then answered gruffly:

"You'll find it no business of your'n where he is of an evening. He's enough to do with you," he muttered to himself, "during the day, I guess, without having his nights broke in upon as well. But if you're ready," he resumed audibly, "I'll show you up to Mrs. Marsh's room."

CHAPTER IV.

THE boys passed an agreeable evening with Mrs. Marsh, who talked to them about their home and amusements, but made no reference to school matters, except to tell them that Collett, the head monitor of the house, would be sure to be kind to them. About ten o'clock she rang the bell, and desired James to show the young gentlemen to their rooms. They shook hands with her, and wished her good night; after which they followed the servant into the passage.

The last-named individual stood for a minute or two regarding them with a curious and doubtful glance, such as a prize-fighter would bestow on one of the same profession, against whom he might ere long be pitted in single combat. The boys were his natural enemies, and he theirs, that was true of all. But there were, according to the slang of the present day, juniors and juniors; some with whom the hostility was merely a smouldering feud, that never broke out into an open flame; and there were some with whom he waged war to the knife, who gave and who deserved no quarter. His real name, it should here be remarked, was "James Watt;" but, in compliment to his peculiar figure, he was currently known in the house as "Jem Squat." No lapse of time, no amount of experience could reconcile him to this latter *sobriquet*. They who made use of it in address-

ing him personally were set down in his mind as offenders of the worst class, whereas those who only employed it in speaking to one another were not beyond the reach of hope. The boarders, in fact, may be said to have been divided by him into two classes, the "Jems" and the "Squats;" and he could not make up his mind at present in which category Poole and Oliver would be included, though he was inclined to fear, from the question put to him by Harry, that he, at least, would be numbered with the "Squats." But he roused himself to remember that, whatever might be their ultimate destination, their present one was their bed-room.

"I 've seen Mrs. Wilson," he said at last; "one of you is to sleep in the fags'-room to-night, and the other in No. 6. The rooms won't be fixed till to-morrow, when the new gentlemen has been placed."

He opened a door as he spoke, on which No. 6 was painted, and invited Harry to enter. Then requesting Charlie to follow him, he turned down a long passage, and made for the farther end of it. As they drew near, sounds were heard from within, which argued that some considerable disturbance was taking place. Dull heavy blows, intermingled with shouts and screams, succeeded each other without intermission, and now and then there came a crash suggestive of the breakage of glass or crockery.

"They's at it," muttered Jem, as these sounds reached his ear: "nice their noses will look at breakfast to-morrow, and half Mrs. Wilson's new bolsters will be unripped! A proper way she'll be in, I expect. Well, anyways, 'taint nothing to me! That's your room, sir," he said, in a louder

voice. "Your box and bag has been unpacked downstairs, and your things brought up."

Charlie said good night, and opened the door pointed out, when a remarkable scene was presented to his view. He found himself in a long low chamber, which had been apparently a loft over a stable, or some such building, and joined on to the house afterwards by a door inserted in the wall. Across the middle there ran a large beam, resting on a partition open towards the centre, so that the room was divided in two parts. On either side of this division were six beds, with their backs to the wall, and about three feet apart from one another. Between every bed there was a sort of cupboard, with a single drawer in it, in which the boys' cloth clothes were kept, and in the window recesses were some wooden shelves pierced with holes. The latter were filled with plain white basins and jugs of the same ware. Several of the last-named had come to grief in the scuffle which was going on, and lay in fragments on the floor. There were no chairs or table, carpet or window-curtains.

All this Charlie learned by subsequent observation. When he entered, he was sensible of nothing but a dizzy whirl of noise and confusion. Twelve boys, it appeared, occupied the room in general, all of them juniors—the twelve juniors, in fact, of the boarding-house, who were probably lumped together after this fashion, on the principle of concentrating as much mischief as possible in one focus, so to speak, and thus bringing it more immediately under observation. There was a monitor's room immediately adjoining, with a door

opening into the dormitory, so that any unusual noise could be heard and repressed. But the Sixth Form had not yet returned, and the other arrangements were not complete, and any chance boys had been put into the room for the night. The division of the chamber into two equal parts had at once suggested a combat of some kind, and the bolsters, being the weapons nearest at hand, were accordingly seized upon. A fierce battle had commenced, and was at its height when Poole entered.

Reader, have you ever witnessed a genuine bolstering match between schoolboys? If you have not, it will be somewhat difficult for you to picture it to yourself. A good deal of skill is often displayed in it by those who are practised hands. The bolster is first examined, to make sure that all the seams are secure, because if they are not, the bolster cannot be used without scattering the whole of its contents over the room. If it is found to be in a sound condition, the feathers are shaken up to one end, rendering it almost as hard and heavy as a sand-bag. The empty end is twisted round to give the hands a firmer hold upon it. A sort of club or life-preserver on a larger scale is thus formed; it is swung over the back, and held with both hands. Then the combatants advance to the attack until they are within striking distance, cautiously watching each other's movements. Presently one makes a feint of striking, which he converts into a real assault if he finds his adversary off his guard. But generally the other springs back, waiting until the assailant's blow has been wasted on the empty air, and then brings his own bolster down on the crown of the other's head, with a

force which would stun any one but a schoolboy, or, perhaps, upon the bridge of the nose, which it skins from top to bottom. The scar thus produced is far from ornamental, and the pain considerable; but the worst feature about it is that it affords indisputable evidence of the manner in which the hurt has been incurred. But boys in general care nothing for scar, or pain, or possible punishment. When they have been once warmed to the battle, they might be scalped like veritable Red Indians, in all likelihood, without any abatement of their ardour. When Charlie Poole entered, this Berserkar-like fury had been fully roused, and the battle was at its height. The air was filled with dust, with a mixture of feathers from one of the bolsters, which had sustained damage by coming into contact with the corner of one of the bedsteads. Figures, attired partly in nightgowns, and partly in trousers, were reeling hither and thither about the chamber, exchanging blows which fell with a heavy thud on the heads and shoulders of the combatants. Before he well knew where he was, a bolster, which had been directed against one of the party who chanced to be near the door, and had slipped lightly out of the way, alighted on our hero's head, and knocked him over like a ninepin. In his fall he caught at the boy who ought to have received the blow, and dragged him to the ground along with him.

"Hallo," exclaimed this individual, "what's up now, then? and who are you?"

"My name is Poole," answered Charlie. "I was told that I was to sleep here."

"Oh, what, you are a new fellow, then, and are to sleep

in that bed, hey? Then you are on our side. We are only five to six at present. Take your bolster and turn to."

Charlie obeyed willingly enough. He knew very little about bolstering, but the art did not seem very difficult of acquirement, and, anyway, it would be good fun.

His new acquaintance prepared the bolster *secundum artem*, and handed it to him. In another minute Charlie was engaged in the thick of the fray, keeping close to his companion's side, and backing him up as well as he was able. The other boys, in the excitement of the contest, hardly noticed his appearance on the scene. The room was only lighted by a single tallow candle, placed on the washstand, and the incessant whirl of the bolsters caused it to flare to such an extent that it hardly gave any light. But our hero noticed, nevertheless, a face and figure among his antagonists which, notwithstanding the *déshabille* of the champion in question, seemed familiar to him. The person in question was a tall, dark, stout lad, with black hair and marked features, and he appeared to be the leader of the opposite party. He laid about him in great style, inflicting considerable damage, and contriving generally to escape retribution at the hands of his victims. Presently the chances of war brought him into collision with Poole's new acquaintance, who offered a gallant but ineffectual resistance, and was compelled to retire for shelter behind one of the bedsteads. His big assailant followed him up, not perceiving Charlie's figure, which was almost concealed behind the bed-curtains. Charlie, however, was on the alert, and as the other raised his bolster to ad-

minister an additional thwack to his flying enemy, that of Charlie descended with full force on his unguarded face, knocking him completely over, besides removing about an inch of skin from the ridge of his nose.

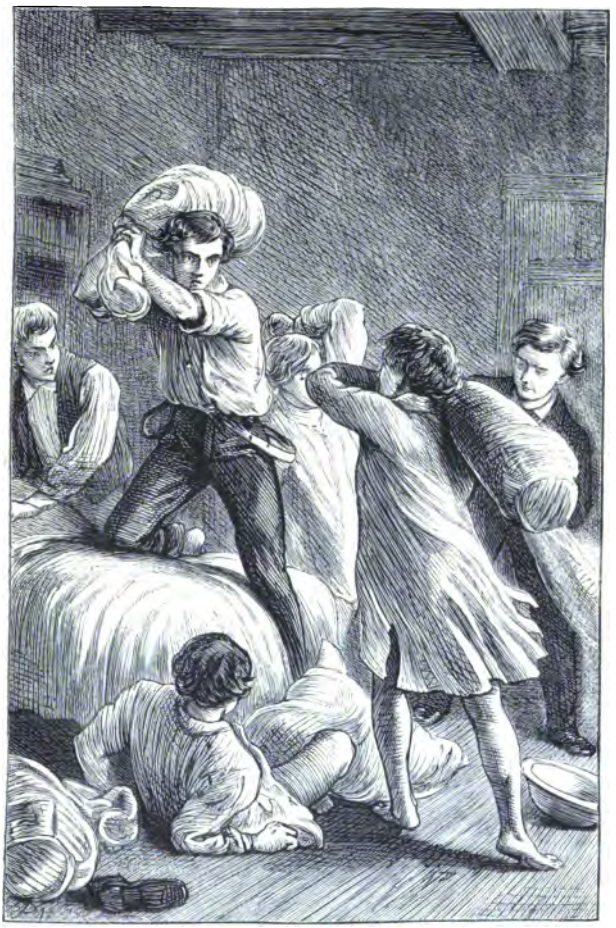
There was a shout of applause from the lookers-on, who had for the moment suspended their own operations to watch the leader's movements. But the latter did not seem to share the general mirth. He sprang up, smarting with pain and annoyance at his unexpected overthrow. We do not propose to repeat his words with literal accuracy. Oaths, unfortunately, were common enough among schoolboys at the date to which this story refers, whatever may be the case now; and the lad in question was notorious among his schoolfellows for the badness of his language.

"Who are you?" he exclaimed; "and what business have you in this room? I'll teach you to come in here without leave, and interfere with our fun. Just fasten the door there, Gabbett, and I'll give him a lesson how he pokes his nose in here again."

"He does belong to our room, Parsons," said Jem Burnet, as Charlie's new acquaintance was called. "He is a new fellow just come, and is to sleep in the corner bed there."

This announcement increased rather than abated Parsons's wrath. "A new fellow, hey?" he exclaimed; "that's cool too, anyway. I say, do you think you are going to hit fellows over the face in that fashion, whose names you don't so much as know? You want your cheek taken down a little, I expect, and I am pretty well inclined to do it."

"I am very sorry," said Charlie; "I thought it was all fun,



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and I was asked to take part in it, or I shouldn't have done so. I didn't mean to knock the skin off your nose in that way, I can assure you."

This remark was followed by a general shout of laughter.

"He has spoilt your beauty, Sam, that's certain," said Gabbett, the boy nearest in size to Parsons. "We shall have Marsh inquiring to-morrow why you have two inches of sticking-plaster, instead of skin, on your nose."

"Marsh be hanged," said Parsons; "it is this fellow I am thinking about, not him. And, by Jove, now I look at you, I believe you are the very fellow I travelled with by the 'Highflyer' to-day—aren't you?"

"Yes, I am," said Poole. "I don't want to quarrel, but I must say I don't think I did anything more than what I was entitled to do."

"I know you are an uncommon cockey chap," returned Parsons. "I owed you one before, and I owe you two now, and you will find that I am not slow to pay my debts." So saying, he raised his bolster and rushed furiously at Charlie, who, unable to defend himself, or return his adversary's blows, was compelled to dodge hither and thither, to avoid severe punishment. The other boys endeavoured to interpose, but to no purpose; Parsons was cock of the room, and interference with him made him only more savage. Charlie would in all likelihood have been seriously hurt, if his deliverance had not been effected in an unexpected manner. In the excitement of the fray, the boys had not heard the sound of footsteps in the passage outside, nor even the sound of the turning of the lock. Just as Charlie reached the door

in his flight, it suddenly flew open. He managed to slip on one side; but his pursuer, whose bolster was already raised on high, was unable to stop himself, and the blow intended for Poole alighted full on the head of the luckless James Watt. The latter dropped the candle which he was carrying, and staggered back against Mr. Marsh, who in turn reeled against the wall—both with difficulty saving themselves from a complete prostration.

The boys stood, for one moment, aghast as they witnessed this catastrophe; but a boy's wits seldom fail him for any length of time. "Sauve qui peut," was the word. The tallow candle in the window was extinguished by the dexterous cast of a shoe. Trousers and stockings were whipped off, and bolsters restored to their shape and place with amazing rapidity. By the time that James had replaced the candle in its former position, and re-entered the room in company with the tutor, not a trace was left of the previous disturbance. They beheld before them a perfectly orderly scene. The boys were not only in their beds, but to all appearance so fast asleep as to be unable to render any explanations.

There was, however, one exception to this—Charlie Poole had not begun to undress, and was not versed enough in school ways to be capable of imitating the manœuvres of his schoolfellows. He stood at the end of his bedstead, looking awkward and embarrassed.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Mr. Marsh, as well as he was able to speak, the recent collision with the school servant having for the time driven the breath out of both their bodies. "You are not hurt, are you, James?"

"Not much, sir," gasped that functionary, who was a good-natured fellow at bottom, and was, moreover, well aware that he would lose nothing by making the best of the matter. "The grease arn't done my waistcoat no good, and the candlestick is pretty well spoiled;" and as he spoke he exhibited the articles in question, the condition of which certainly went far to bear out his words.

"I shall see that it is made good to you," said Mr. Marsh. "And, pray, why are you not in bed?" he proceeded, addressing Poole, who still retained his attitude. "Who is it, James?" he continued, noticing that Charlie made no reply. "I don't think I know him."

"It is a new gentleman, sir," said James, "only came to-day. I showed him up here, by Mrs. Wilson's order, about half an hour ago."

"Oh, aye," said Mr. Marsh, "it is Poole, I suppose. Of course he knows nothing about this; but the others do. Who is the head boy here?"

No one answered.

"Why does not some one speak?"

"They 's all asleep," suggested Watt, with a grin.

"Asleep, hey?" repeated Mr. Marsh, walking up to the nearest boy, and giving him a smart rap on the head with his key. "I 'll soon wake them. Who is this? Oh, Burnet, I see. Who is head boy in this room, Burnet?"

"Eh, what?" exclaimed Burnet, staring stupidly at the candle, and then letting his head drop again drowsily on the pillow.

"Who is the head boy in this room?" repeated Mr.

Marsh, administering a second and a sharper admonition with the key.

"Parsons, sir," answered Burnet, promptly, having discovered by this time that Mr. Marsh was fully as wide awake as himself.

"Oh, Parsons, eh?" The tutor moved up to the bedside of the boy named, and aroused him to consciousness after the same manner as his predecessor. "Now, Parsons, what is the meaning of this disturbance?"

"I don't know, I 'm sure, sir," replied Parsons, innocently.

"Oh, you don't," returned Mr. Marsh, "and you don't know who was making it either, I suppose?"

"I don't know that I could fix upon anybody in particular, sir."

"I dare say not. Well, anyhow, you will make out a list of the boys who sleep in this room, and bring it to me to-morrow morning after breakfast. Now do you, boys, remember that if I hear any more disturbance in this room, you will, all of you, be locked up during play-hours to-morrow, independently of any punishment I may order for the present disturbance."

With these words Mr. Marsh withdrew, followed by James. Charlie had watched him narrowly throughout the whole scene, and had observed with uneasiness that his face was very red, and there was a thickness in his speech which he was at no loss to account for. How very shocking it was, and how could all this have failed to reach the ears of his tutor and Mr. Locke? To be sure, it was just as extraordinary that it should have been overlooked by the parents of

all the other boys. He had heard before that parents very seldom really know what is passing in schools to which they send their sons, but this exceeded anything he could have believed. He listened anxiously, when the sound of their footsteps had died away, expecting to hear some remark made on the subject by the other boys. But they were too sleepy to renew either their bolstering match or their conversation, and scarcely a word passed, except an interchange of good nights. It was evident that they were too familiar with such exhibitions to remark upon them. Well, he would hear more to-morrow, and then all he had learned should be transmitted to Barstone; of that he was resolved. He undressed and got into bed as well as he was able in the dark, and was soon, like his companions, buried in slumber.

The two friends met in the school-room on the following morning, when they were examined by Mr. Manson, the second master, and by him remitted to the Upper Division of the Fourth Form. This was one class at least higher than had been anticipated, and was probably due to the good grounding in Latin and Greek which they had received from Mr. Locke. They escaped, in consequence, the limbo of the fags'-room, which consisted of the boys of the First and Second and the juniors of the Third Forms. When the room list was issued, which occurred immediately after morning school, Poole and Oliver found that they were to be occupants, along with two other Fourth Form boys, called Cobbe and Wilkie, of No. 14, a room on the upper story, and looking out into the school quadrangle—so at least Jem informed them.

"Let us go up and take a look at it, Harry," suggested Charles. "Jem here says our boxes won't be carried up till after dinner, so we can't take possession, but we may as well have a sight of it."

Oliver assented, and they ascended the great stone staircase till they reached the highest story, and found themselves opposite to a door on which 14 was painted in white letters. Opening this, Charlie found himself in an apartment which was in every way a contrast to that in which he had slept on the previous night. It was a snug room enough, some fifteen feet square, with a large Elizabethan window in the wall opposite the door. A table stood near the casement, a fixture apparently, and very solid and strong. Four chairs of the same construction were arranged against the walls. On one side were four narrow iron bedsteads, with an interval of two feet or so between each. Against the opposite wall stood a long bookcase, the lower part consisting of four chests of drawers. In the fireplace, which was in the wall opposite the window, a fire was burning. There was a hearthrug, though not a very good one, in front of the fender, and there were some old moreen curtains over the window. Altogether, the room had an appearance of comfort; and such seemed to be the opinion of its only occupant when they entered. A kind of easy chair had been constructed of two of the ordinary room chairs, and two pillows from the beds. On these a lad of about their own age was seated by the fireside, reading. He put aside his book as they entered, and accosted them with much affability.

"Poole and Oliver, I suppose," he said. "I saw Mrs.

Wilson's list about half an hour ago. Wilkie has not yet returned, but when he does I am sure he will be as glad to see you as I am."

"You are very kind," said Poole, civilly. "Your name is Cobbe, I suppose?"

"Cornelius Cobbe," returned the other; "a singular name you will say, but we do not choose our own names. And have I been rightly told that you are both placed in the Upper Division of the Fourth?"

"Yes," said Oliver, "so the second master told us."

"That is better still," returned Cobbe; "we shall all three be in the same class, and so be mutually able to help one another.

"You see," he resumed, observing that the other seemed a little puzzled and made no reply, "you see the great means of relieving people from trouble is by the division of labour. Now, the school work may be divided into two heads, the composition and the construing. The first head comprehends the Verses, the Themes, and the Exercises; the second includes the Analecta, the Ovid, and the Cæsar. Observe, the great thing is to determine what branch of study each one is best suited for. Now, I hear that Poole's verses obtained great praise from Manson to-day, and Oliver's Latin prose was almost as much commended. For me, I cannot compare with either of you in these particulars; but I think that, with pains, I might do the exercises correctly. Clearly, then, Poole had better do the three copies of verses, and Oliver the three themes, while I devote myself to the three sets of exercises. The same with the authors. Suppose

Poole undertakes the construing of the Analecta, Oliver that of the Ovid, and I the Cæsar. In this way it is pleasant to think how much we shall be able to improve each other."

Master Corny omitted to state that he possessed an English translation of Cæsar, which he kept carefully hidden behind his other books, and which would enable him to perform the portion of the work he had allotted to himself without much difficulty. But, though ignorant of this fact, neither of the Barstone boys were soft enough to acquiesce in his suggestions without question.

"Improve each other," repeated Oliver. "I don't exactly see that. I dare say it would save us trouble, but I don't know—I am not sure."

"You are not sure that it would be as improving as it would be convenient?" said Cobbe.

"Well, that 's what I meant, certainly," said Harry. "You see, my father and Mr. Locke——"

"You astonish me," again broke in the other. "Have you never read that interesting account of pin-making, by which it is clearly shown that when men work together, every one of them can do ten times as much work as if they did their tasks separately?"

"I have read that," replied Oliver, "but I am not sure it is quite the same in a school."

"True," asserted Cobbe, "it is not *quite* the same. There are some things here in which we cannot help one another. Learning lines by heart, for instance. One fellow can't learn them for another, except under peculiar circumstances."

"Not under any circumstances at all, I should have thought," remarked Poole. "A fellow can no more learn lines for me to say, than he can wash his hands or comb his hair for me."

"Excuse me," said their new friend, affably, "but it is possible sometimes. We had two fellows here, a half or two ago, named Garrow. They were twins, I believe; any way, they were as like as two peas. They were, in consequence, enabled to help one another a good deal more than other fellows could. If it happened to be inconvenient for either of them to attend when names were called, Castor would first answer to his own name, and afterwards to that of Pollux. Castor, again, would learn the repetitions for Mondays and Thursdays, and Pollux those for Tuesdays and Saturdays. A great deal of labour was saved in that way."

"Were they never found out?" inquired Poole, a good deal amused.

"Unluckily, yes," replied Cobbe. "West, the Second Form master, happened accidentally to come plump against Pollux in the school passage, and Pollux's cheek struck against a slate which West had in his hand. It was a good deal cut, and left a big scar. West remembered it the next day at repetition, and meant to ask Pollux whether he had been much hurt. The first brother that came up to say his lines had no cut on his face, therefore he wasn't the right one; but by-and-bye the second one appeared, and his cheek was all sound too. West couldn't make it out, and smelt a rat. He told Castor to stay where he was, and sent a monitor to fetch the other. Presently Pollux appeared. There

was the scar sure enough; but when West set him to say the rep., he didn't know a word of it. So the dodge was blown upon. But there is the dinner-bell. I 'll go down and keep places for you two. I dare say Jack Wilkie has come by this time. If so, we four will sit together."

He ran off, and the two boys prepared to follow.

"A rum chap that, Charlie," remarked Oliver, as they descended the stairs.

"Yes," assented Charlie. "I never saw a rummer. I can't help thinking I have fallen in with him before; but that must be fancy."

CHAPTER V.

THE dining-room of Marsh's house, or "The Hall," as it was usually called, was a large and reasonably high room on the ground floor. Down the middle of it ran a long table, at which sat the boys belonging to the four lowest forms in the school. Two smaller tables were placed on either side of the fireplace—the larger one to the left, being appropriated to the Fifth Form boys, of whom there were some ten or twelve in the house, and that to the right to the monitors. This last was not of plain deal like the others, but of mahogany, and was furnished with chairs in place of benches. Neither of the small tables was laid for dinner on the present occasion, the Fifth and Sixth Form boys not having yet returned. The head monitor present was usually held responsible for the orderly behaviour of the boys during the meal; but to-day, in the absence of the upper classes, Mr. Marsh himself was present to maintain the discipline.

Two or three places from the top of the table, our hero recognized his antagonist of the previous day—easy enough of recognition, indeed, not only from his size and marked features, but by reason of a patch of sticking-plaster, an inch and a half long, which adorned his nose. It would appear that he had already received a considerable number of compliments respecting the peculiarity of his appearance, which did not tend to the improvement of his temper, though the

latter was not at any time remarkable for its sweetness. He had been further rendered more than usually savage by a heavy imposition, with which Mr. Marsh had punished the offence of the previous evening. Mrs. Wilson had sent in an angry complaint that two of the new bolsters had been damaged, one of them being half unripped; and the latter, she affirmed, belonged to Parsons's bed, though it had been transferred to Poole's. Taking into consideration this circumstance, the fact of Parsons being the head boy of the room, and the evidence of his forwardness in the fray which his own nose bore against him, Mr. Marsh had ordered him to write out two hundred lines of Virgil before leaving the boarding-house. He was now regarding Charlie (for whom he had been on the look-out ever since school-time) with an expression of face that boded the junior boy no good.

"What's the matter with Sam Parsons?" whispered Cobbe to Poole. "And why does he look at you in that manner?"

Charlie told him in a few words the history of last night's adventure.

"By Jove, and you skinned his nose in that manner, did you? 'Aferin,' well done, as the Turks say. But he'll owe you one, you may make sure of that; and I judge he means to pay ready money. I say, Jack," he continued, addressing a good-humoured-looking lad about his own size, who had arrived just before dinner, and had been presented to Poole and Oliver as Jack Wilkie, their messmate, "I say, Jack, we must get Poole off as soon as dinner is over, or Parsons will be pitching into him."

"What has he done?" asked Wilkie.

"Barked his nose with a bolster, as you may see for yourself," returned Cobbe. "Improves his looks, don't it?"

"Particularly," returned Wilkie. "He must be a brick, this new fellow. We had better make a rush for it all together as soon as Marsh leaves the room, and tumble up into No. 14. We can bar the door—both bars are there all right, and Parsons may kick his shoes off before he'll get in. To-morrow it will be all right."

"Yes; Armstrong comes this afternoon and the monitors to-morrow, and they'll put a stopper upon Sam fast enough. Very well, I'll put Poole up to cutting it as soon as the tutor goes. He is just going to say grace now."

But the best-arranged plans are liable to miscarriage. Parsons had been on the look-out, as well as Wilkie and Cobbe. As Mr. Marsh left the hall, he was closely followed by Gabbett, one of Parsons's most intimate chums, who stationed himself at the door, and forbade all egress. Two minutes afterwards, Poole was seized upon by two or three juniors, who obeyed, promptly enough, Parsons's bidding—partly because they would have been licked if they had not done so, and partly because they wanted to know what was coming next.

"That's the fellow there," cried Parsons, "the new fellow in the blue jacket and pepper-and-salt trousers: fetch him this way, neck and heels if he won't come without."

"You needn't hustle," said Poole, shaking himself clear of their hold, "I'm willing to go without being hauled." So

saying, he walked up to the fireplace, where Parsons had now seated himself in one of the monitors' chairs. The other boys gathered closely round, those who could not get near mounting on the forms and tables.

"Oh, so here you are?" began Parsons, as Poole presented himself. "Well, now, don't you think you are a precious cheeky sort of a fellow, and want taking down two or three pegs? because *I* think so, if you don't. Do you know you have got me into an awful row with Marsh, and besides that, you have—you have——"

"Besides that, you have skinned my nose from top to bottom," suggested a voice from the rear, which all recognized as Cobbe's.

Parsons looked more savage than before, but he was too wise to enter on a war of words with Cobbe. "Besides that, you have got me in for an imposition, which will keep me the whole afternoon."

"What is it, Sam?" asked Gabbett, who was a heavy-looking lad, as strong apparently, though not as tall, as Parsons.

"Two hundred lines of Virgil to write out," returned the other.

"Well, I should make him do it," said Gabbett, "if I were you."

"I mean to," said Parsons. "That's what I wanted him for. Now, I say, you fellow, what's your name? I have forgotten it, if I ever heard it."

"My name is Poole," said Charlie.

"Well then, Poole, you will just go upstairs, do you hear?

and take a Virgil, and copy out the first two hundred lines of the Third Æneid. If you bring me that before supper-time, I will let you off the licking I was going to give you. Only I wouldn't advise you to try it on with me again, or you won't get off quite so easy. Now, take yourself off—do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear," said Charlie, quietly; "but I don't see that I did get you into the row with Mr. Marsh. You ran after me with the bolster, and I only dodged out of the way. I didn't know that the man was coming in with the candle, any more than you did."

"Gammon. If you hadn't hit me with the bolster, which was a confounded piece of cheek, I shouldn't have gone to that end of the room at all; but I am not going to palaver with you. Are you going to do the imposition or not?"

"No, I am not," said the other, stoutly; "not a line of it."

"You are not? Then you will have something you will like still less. Here, Sutton, run up into my room, and fetch me down my colt. Hold him tight," he added, addressing the same boys whom, in the first instance, he had sent to fetch Charlie, "and give him a winder or two to keep him quiet if he is troublesome."

Charlie struggled fiercely, and his two friends tried to come to his rescue; but they were soon seized and turned out of the hall, while Poole himself found it impossible to shake off the hold of his adversaries. He was reduced before long to inaction, and very few remarks were made until Sutton returned with Parsons's "colt," a stout piece of

rope, about a foot and a half long, twisted and knotted in a very artistic fashion. Parsons inspected it with considerable satisfaction. "It's in capital order," he said, "and would do any sailor credit. I guess this will soon bring him to reason. Now then, lads, take him up."

The boys, who seemed to be too much under dread of Parsons to venture to disobey, at once complied with this order. They dragged Charlie, in spite of his resistance, on to his knees in front of one of the forms, and forcibly held him down, while Parsons proceeded to lay into him with his weapon. Charlie struggled with all his might to break away; but he would not condescend to make any entreaty for mercy, or utter any cry of pain. Provoked at his obduracy, Parsons struck harder and harder. The passions of both boys were presently roused to the uttermost, the one determined to make his victim give in, and the other equally resolved to hold out to the last. At length the punishment grew so severe that the other boys grew alarmed.

"Hold hard, Sam," said Gabbett, *sotto voce:* "he can't stand much more, I expect, and he is a plucky fellow, I must say that for him."

"Plucky or not plucky, he shall do my imposition," replied Parsons, "or I 'll cut him in half."

How long this might have lasted it is impossible to say, though it is probable that Poole would have fainted with pain in a few minutes more; but at this moment the door of the hall was opened, the boys who had been put in charge of it falling away on either side.

"What do you open the door for?" shouted Parsons,

angrily, as he saw them quit their hold on the lock. "I won't have anybody come in, I tell you."

"Won't you?" said a voice. "I don't think I shall ask your leave."

At the same moment a boy, rather shorter in stature and not nearly so strong as Parsons, but evidently older, entered the hall. Parsons gazed at him in blank dismay, and his myrmidons, relaxing their hold on Poole, allowed him to regain his legs. He rose, though with some difficulty, casting at the same time a look at the new-comer, in whom, to his surprise, he recognized the youth whom he had seen riding down the street at Gorchester on the previous day. He had now an opportunity of observing him more closely, and his first impression as to his good looks and gentlemanly bearing was confirmed. He had dark eyes and hair, a good forehead and features, and the expression of his face was at once intelligent and pleasant.

"I don't think I shall ask your leave," he repeated, good-humouredly. "Who is this, and what is the matter? What, Parsons again, hey? Why, you had just come to grief when I saw you in the High Street at Gorchester yesterday. You were scrimmaging with somebody, or had got a spill off the coach, or something of the kind. Did you damage your nose after that fashion in the fall?"

"No," said Parsons, endeavouring to rally from his embarrassment, but with very indifferent success, "it was done in a bolstering match."

"Was it? Well, it doesn't improve your style of beauty, that's certain, whenever it may have been done. And who

is this fellow here?" he continued, turning to Charlie. "Why, I'll be flogged if that is not the very fellow I saw in Gorchester yesterday, who had fallen, or been knocked off, the coach along with you! Is he a friend of yours, Parsons?"

"No," returned Parsons, sulkily; "I never saw him in my life till yesterday."

"Well, he seems to have undergone damage too," remarked the monitor, whose name Poole soon afterwards discovered to be Collett. "He is a new fellow, isn't he? What is your name?" he continued, addressing Charlie.

"Poole, sir," answered the boy, who was evidently greatly impressed with the importance of the new-comer.

"You needn't 'sir' me," said Collett, good-naturedly. "Did your clothes get torn in that way in your tumble yesterday?"

"No," said Poole; "I wasn't hurt at all yesterday. It was——"

"It was what?" repeated Collett, sharply, observing his hesitation.

"Oh, nothing," resumed Poole, who had a schoolboy's horror of "telling" of another boy, even to one of his own schoolfellows.

Collett's suspicions were roused. "It looks to me as though there had been something," he said, as he noticed Charlie's torn jacket and trousers. "What have you been doing to him, Parsons, and what have you got in your hand there?" he added, as his eye fell on the colt, which the other had been unable to thrust entirely into his pocket. "Hand up, there."

Parsons obeyed without remonstrance. It was curious to see his tall burly figure fidgeting uncomfortably, and almost cowering, before another lad of much slighter build, shorter by an inch or two, and probably a stone lighter than himself.

"What, you have been pitching into him with this, hey?" said the monitor, in a tone of disgust, as he handled the colt.

"He was impudent," said Parsons, sulkily.

"What did he say or do?" pursued Collett.

Parsons made no answer.

"What have you said or done?" continued Collett, turning to Poole. "If you cheek fellows bigger than yourself, you know, of course, you will get licked."

"I didn't cheek him," returned Poole, thus appealed to. "When I went up to bed last night, all the fellows in the room were bolstering, and one of them called to me to take my bolster and join them. In the scrimmage I hit Parsons over the nose."

"And a very handsome cut you gave him," remarked Collett, "I must say that. Was that all?"

"No, it wasn't," continued Poole. "All of a sudden, when no one expected it, the door opened, and the servant and Mr. Marsh——"

"We call him Marsh when speaking to one another," said Collett, "and keep the Mr. for the masters themselves. But go on."

"Well, Parsons couldn't stop himself, and his bolster knocked the candle out of the servant's hand, and nearly

knocked him and Mr. Marsh—Marsh, I mean—nearly knocked them over."

"That must have been something to see," remarked the monitor. "Well, what then?"

"Mr.—I mean Marsh—gave Parsons two hundred lines of Virgil to write out," pursued Charlie, "and Parsons said it was my fault, and I must write the Virgil out instead of him."

"How was it your fault?" asked Collett.

"Well, he said he hit at me, and if I hadn't got out of the way, he wouldn't have hit the candle or the servant."

"Ingenious," remarked the monitor. "But you didn't admit the force of the argument, I suppose?"

"I said I didn't see that it was my fault," said the boy, "and I didn't mean to write out the Virgil; and then he took the rope and made the fellows here hold me down while he licked me."

"Is that true, Parsons?" asked Collett.

"He was impudent, or I shouldn't have licked him," said Parsons, as sullenly as before.

"Impudent! you said that before. What did he say that was impudent, and how many cuts have you given him?" he resumed, noticing that Parsons remained silent. "How many cuts did he give him?" continued Collett, turning to Burnet, who was standing next him; "and was Poole impudent?"

"Poole only said that he would not do Parsons's imposition," returned Burnet. "I should think Parsons must have given him thirty or forty cuts. I didn't count them, but I

judge it was about that. What do you think?" he added, appealing to two juniors, Ives and Garnet, who, though they had obeyed Parsons's commands, regarded that individual with no greater amount of affection than did Burnet himself.

"Somewhere about that, I should fancy," said Ives.

"Nearer forty than thirty," added Garnet.

"Thirty or forty cuts with this," remarked Collett, throwing the implement of torture into the fire. "Now, do you just listen to me, Parsons. I know you are a beastly bully, and I have once or twice warned you that I won't have you trying it on in this house. You are pretty high up in the school, and it is the first day of the half, or I would fetch out my whalebone, and give you such a licking as you wouldn't forget for the next year to come. As it is, my riding-whip, which luckily I haven't put away yet, will serve for the occasion. Stand up."

Parsons obeyed, and, albeit he was the larger and stronger of the two, received six or seven stinging cuts of the whip in dogged silence; after which he left the room. Collett also withdrew to unpack, and the other boys, Wilkie among them, dispersed in various directions. Cobbe, Charlie, and Harry returned to No. 14.

"Well, that was not a bad wind-up to the business, I must say," remarked Cobbe, when they had regained the room. "If you get through everything else as well as you have through this, you won't have much to complain of during your stay here."

"Aye, if we *do* stay here," said Oliver; "but, after what we have heard, I doubt whether we shall be allowed to do so.

Charlie, you haven't written to Barstone, I suppose, have you?"

"I haven't had a moment's time," replied Poole; "but I mean to do so at once. The more I think of it, the more sure I am they ought to be told."

"I would not be in a hurry if I were you," said Cobbe. "Wait a few days, at all events. There are very few like Parsons in the school, I assure you."

"Parsons!" repeated Poole, contemptuously, "who cares about him?"

"Has anybody else ill-used you?" inquired their friend, anxiously.

"Not ill-used us—it isn't that," said Oliver. "Look here, Charlie, hadn't we better ask Cobbe about this before we write? I 'm sure he 'll tell us the truth, and it may be a mistake. The truth is," he continued, finding that Poole did not stop him, "that we met a fellow—a gentleman, I suppose—outside the the coach yesterday, who told us something about the head master and Marsh here, which, if it is true——"

"Depend upon it it is not true if you heard anything to their discredit," interposed Cobbe, warmly. "What did this person say of them?"

"He told us that Doctor Formby had been had up before the magistrates, and fined for savagely beating one of the boys; and that Marsh was little better than—was given to drink, in short."

"Abominable!" exclaimed Cobbe, indignantly, "to think that things should be so misrepresented! It is all jealousy, all envy! The truth is that there are some persons, who

ought to know better, in this town, who are continually maligning the masters, and particularly Dr. Formby and Mr. Marsh. I hope you will not attribute the slightest weight to what the passenger outside the coach told you. I think I can guess who it must have been, though it seems almost too bad to be believed. Ah, what is this, James?" he continued, as the door opened and James Watt entered with a note in his hand; "is that for me?"

"No, sir, for Mr. Poole."

"Ah, indeed," proceeded Cobbe, taking the note, notwithstanding the servant's reply, and critically examining it. "You may go, James; I don't suppose there will be any answer. Why, Poole," he resumed as James Watt closed the door behind him, "this is from some lady or gentleman, that is clear from the handwriting, and the envelope and seal are to match. You never told me you had friends in the town."

"No, nor have I," returned Poole. "It must be meant for somebody else."

"It is directed to you, anyhow," said Cobbe.

"You had better look inside the note," suggested Oliver, "that will soon explain the matter."

Charlie complied. He broke the seal—a coat of arms apparently—and glanced at the signature, which was at the bottom of the third page. "Horne," he exclaimed, "W. Horne. I never heard the name before."

"Horne, Horne," repeated Cobbe. "Not Prebendary Horne in the Close here, to be sure! And yet his name *is* William. I declare it is," he continued, taking up the letter,

which Charlie had laid down. "Look at the date, 'Prebendal House, the Close;' and it begins, 'My dear young friend.' It is clear he knows you, whether you know him or not."

"It is very odd," said Poole. "He can hardly be a friend of my father's or of Mr. Locke's, or they would certainly have mentioned it."

"Well, any way, you had better read what he says," again interposed Oliver. "No doubt that will solve the mystery."

Charlie complied, and read a follows:—

"'MY DEAR YOUNG FRIEND,—The deep interest which I always take in the young, especially when entering upon so important a period of their lives as their first experience of a public school, induces me to address this letter to you. The conversation, also, which passed between us——'

"Conversation," repeated Charlie, when he got to this point. "I never saw the gentleman in my life, to my knowledge, much less had any conversation with him."

"You might have talked to him without knowing who he was," suggested Harry. "Go on with the letter."

"'The conversation which I had with you,' continued Charlie, 'has much heightened that interest, and my wish to serve you. Of course, you will keep this most strictly private.' Hullo, I say, I didn't notice that, or I oughtn't, I suppose, to have read the letter aloud."

"There is no harm done," suggested Cobbe. "We are all friends here, and indeed we all need Mr. Horne's help, one as much as another."

"'Of course you will keep this most strictly private,' resumed Charlie; 'but if you should find yourself involved in any difficulties at school, either from excessive severity, or from the influence of bad example, on the part of those from whom you might well expect a very different demeanour—you will excuse my speaking more particularly on such a subject—but if anything of this kind *should* happen, bear in mind that I shall be ready to give you at all times my advice and help. In the afternoons I am almost always at home and disengaged, and I shall be very glad if you and your friend will occasionally call upon me, and inform me how you are getting on.—I am, my dear boy, your very sincere friend,

"W. HORNE."

"This must be intended for somebody else!" exclaimed Charlie, as he finished reading. "Is there any fellow of the same name as myself in the school?"

"None that I know of," said Cobbe. "There is a fellow called O'Toole, to be sure, at Norman's boarding-house; but he has been here two or three years, and, besides, I am pretty sure that he does not know Mr. Horne. It is very odd!"

"Stop!" said Oliver, to whom an idea had suddenly occurred. "What sort of looking man is Prebendary Horne?"

"What sort of looking man?" repeated Cobbe. "Oh, he is not much to look at, that I must admit. He is very small and pale, and wears spectacles, and——"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Poole and Oliver together. "That's the fellow we met outside the 'Highflyer' yesterday."

"What! who told you those infamous falsehoods about

Dr. Formby and Mr. Marsh?" said Cobbe. "Well, since you have yourselves lighted on the probable truth, I will not deny that my own strong suspicions were directed to Prebendary Horne, though I was most unwilling to give them utterance. I have relatives in the town who are well acquainted with him, and I fear——"

"But what am I to do?" interrupted Poole. "What notice am I to take of the letter?"

"Well, I think you ought to go up and see Mr. Horne," said Cobbe. "It is possible—nay, it is not unlikely—that he has been imposed upon by some of the boys here, who are only too apt to talk against the masters. Mr. Horne ought not to be allowed to remain in error on such a subject. Don't you think so?" he added.

"I do, certainly," said Oliver; "and so, I am pretty sure, would my father or Mr. Locke."

"Well, I don't mind going to see him," said Poole. "When would be the best time to call on him?"

"Oh, any day after four," said Cobbe. "The cathedral service is over just at that time, so that you are tolerably sure to find any of the canons in then."

"Very well, then," said Poole, "I will go to see him as soon as I have an opportunity."

The conversation was here interrupted by a message to Cobbe, announcing that his Cousin Armstrong had just arrived, and the boy hurried off to receive him.

CHAPTER VI.

COBBE did not return; and lock-up being over, the boys went out for a walk along the banks of the Lynde in the direction of Brandleigh; choosing that way because they wanted to have a good talk without interruption, and nearly all the boys they saw were walking in the opposite direction. They agreed that so far they liked Westonbury very much, and that several of the fellows seemed very jolly, but Collett was a regular trump. From all they could hear of Sydenham, also, he was just such another as Collett, only a still greater swell; and if he took them up, as no doubt he would, they would be safe to get on quite swimmingly. The only thing that troubled them was Mr. Horne's letter. It did seem so strange that any clergyman, holding so high a position in Westonbury, could venture on such statements as those which he had made, if they were wholly without foundation especially as it was done in so public a manner. Cobbe's assurances, notwithstanding the earnestness with which they had been made, failed entirely to remove their doubts. However, another day would make the matter clear, and they need not write to Barstone till then.

They returned to Marsh's about five, where they found Wilkie awaiting them, and making preparations for tea. The maid had brought up the regular allowance of bread and butter, milk, sugar and tea, allowed to each boy; and Jack

was seated at the fire, engaged in making toast. He looked up as they entered, and they had a better sight of him than they had had time to take before. He was about Harry's size, with a ruddy brown complexion, dark curly hair, and a merry smile, and his character corresponded to his outward appearance. He was as good a specimen of an ordinary English schoolboy as could easily be found—quick and intelligent, but careless and indisposed to work; generous and honourable according to his creed, but that creed not a very severe one; a pleasant companion to any one whom he liked, and a merciless enemy to humbug of all kinds. He was disposed to like Charlie and Harry from what he had seen of them, and greeted them accordingly.

"Come in," he said, "I 've made the tea. We take it by weeks to do that, and I 'll take the first week. Corny isn't coming back to tea, he 's having it with his cousins, Tom Rolles and Phil Armstrong. I say, how jolly well Sam Parsons was sold to-day! I shan't forget his face when he saw Collett. I never knew a monitor come back on the second day before."

"What brought him back?" asked Poole.

"Oh, it seems that a lot of old Westonburies are going to give a cup, to be rowed for every year, and a meeting was to be held to-morrow about it, at which the attendance of the two head monitors was wanted. They couldn't put it off, because the old Dean and Prebendary Horne couldn't be there on any other day. So Sydenham and Collett returned to-day, instead of to-morrow evening. The meeting is in the afternoon, I believe."

"Horne, did you say, Prebendary Horne? What sort of a fellow is he?" asked Oliver.

"What sort of fellow is Horne? oh, a jolly old chap, a great favourite with the fellows here. He's an old Westonbury—of course he is that, though, or he wouldn't be at the meeting. But he is a regular brick. He always comes down to see the cricket match with the Halminsters, and very often the North and South at football. He generally asks the school eleven to dinner, if he's here in June."

"Does Dr.—I mean, does Formby let them go?" asked Oliver in surprise.

"Let them go?" repeated Wilkie, in at least equal surprise. "Why shouldn't he? He and Horne are as thick as two inkle-weavers."

"That's very odd," said Oliver. "Charlie and I met him outside the coach yesterday, and he found out where we were going to, and he spoke of Formby and Marsh in such a manner to us—I can't tell you what he didn't say—Formby was a brute that licked fellows so savagely, that he was fined by the magistrates! and Marsh drank like anything——"

"It cannot have been old Horne that you met," said Wilkie. "He would never talk in that way of any one, and least of all of Formby and Marsh. Besides, I think it unlikely he would be travelling outside a stage coach."

"What sort of a fellow to look at is Horne?" asked Poole.

"A great big fellow," replied Wilkie, "six foot two, I should think, and tremendously broad across the shoulders. He is getting an old man now; but I have heard that when he was a boy, he was the crack football-player and cricketer of the

school. He was a wonderful fellow to slash at cricket. There's a ditch at the end of the 'First Eleven piece' which is still called 'Horne's Swipe,' because he is said to have hit a ball into it. One of the monitors at the dinner last year, proposed 'Horne's Swipe' as one of the toasts. The eleven drank it with three times three, and the old fellow was immensely pleased."

"I say, Charlie, there must be some mistake here," said Oliver; "Cobbe told us he was a little pale fellow——"

"Cobbe," interrupted Wilkie, pricking up his ears, "has *he* been talking to you about old Horne?"

"Yes," said Oliver, "and it's plain that either he misunderstood us, or we him. Your description and his——"

"But, Harry, you forget Mr. Horne's letter," interrupted Poole: "that must have come from the person we met outside the 'Highflyer,' and that is signed with Mr. Horne's name. There may be two gentlemen whose names are the same, though to be sure——"

"Let us have a look at the letter, if you don't mind," said Wilkie. "I think I can guess what this means. And, by-the-bye," he added, as Charlie somewhat reluctantly produced the missive in question, "what sort of a fellow to look at do you say the coach passenger was?"

"Well, he was short and thin, I should say," returned Oliver; "but he was so closely wrapped up, that one could hardly make him out, and he wore greenish spectacles——"

"Where did he get up? He came by the 'Highflyer,' you said, didn't you?" interposed Wilkie quickly.

"Yes," said Harry, "he joined the coach at Stoverton.

Whether he was Mr. Horne or not, he was certainly a regular swell at Latin and Greek. I heard him quote Virgil's Æneid more than once——"

Wilkie broke into a shout of laughter. "Oh, Corny, Corny, you villain," he burst out, "what a fellow you are, to be sure! Well, Poole, it's no shame to you to have been taken in by him, for he would take in anybody that ever lived. But the fellow you met on the 'Highflyer' yesterday, with his spectacles and palaver, was no other than our mess-mate, Corny Cobbe himself."

"Cobbe!" exclaimed Poole and Oliver together; "what, the fellow we were talking to this morning?" added Oliver. "Gammon! The man on the coach was an old party, he walked like one, and his voice wasn't like Cobbe's, and Cobbe isn't short-sighted. I saw him reading quite small print as easy as possible, and the other fellow couldn't see without spectacles——"

"Couldn't he?" said Wilkie. "I guess there are few fellows who can see farther. He's always up to these tricks. He keeps the green spectacles in his pocket, just for the pleasure of hoaxing people, and he can talk in pretty nearly any voice he likes. And as for his quotations, they all come from the First Æneid of Virgil. He knows that by heart, and is always spouting some passage of it. It is quite a joke in the school to hear him. Before he learnt that, he used to quote Gay's 'Fables.'"

"What made him learn a whole Æneid by heart?" asked Poole, who, though staggered at Wilkie's confident assurances, was still somewhat sceptical.

"What made him? Why, Marsh made him, if you must know. Very like Corny that business was, by-the-bye. Just before the winter there are always recitations. Half a dozen fellows or so from each form recite every week during November and December, and the masters prepare all the fellows in their class to recite properly. It happens that old West, in whose class Corny then was, talks a good deal through his nose. He takes a great deal of snuff, I believe. Anyhow, he pronounces the 'm' like a 'b,' and the 'n' like a 'd,' as the fellow in 'Oliver Twist' does; and his mode of speaking is a great joke in the school. Well, when Corny came to recite, he imitated old West so exactly, that the very masters couldn't help laughing. His passage was from the First Æneid of Virgil, the speech of Juno, near the beginning. Corny began:

> 'Cub Judo æterdub servads sub pectore vuldus
> Hæc secub. Bede idcepto desistere victab.
> Dec posse Italia Teucrorub avertere regeb;'

and so on for half a dozen lines, without moving a muscle of his face; while every one else was splitting with laughter, except West, who sat looking as black as his hat. At last Marsh recovered himself enough to stop him. Manson ought to have presided, as it was the Lower School recitations; but, luckily for Corny, he was laid up in bed, and Marsh had to take his place. Corny was had up for it the next day, and declared, with a face as innocent as a baby's, that he had really recited the passage as he had been told to recite it; and they say Marsh had the greatest difficulty

in keeping his countenance. But he punished Corny, nevertheless, by obliging him to learn the whole Æneid by heart, and wouldn't let him out till he had done it. He took a week and more over it; but when he once did know it, he made good use of it in the way of quotation, as you heard yesterday."

"Well, he must be a tolerably impudent sort of fellow," said Poole, who had been a good deal amused at the anecdote; "but I declare I can hardly believe now that the fellow we met on the Barstone coach wasn't an old fellow. He must be a wonderful actor, as well as a proper cool hand, that's certain."

"Yes, that *is* certain," said Wilkie. "He'd make a manager's fortune, he would. Why, I'll tell you what happened two halves ago, just this time year. I was then in the fags'-room, and saw it myself. The monitors of the house were all away, dining with friends in the town, as it was a saint's day; and it was reported that Mother Wilson had been sent for, as her sister was ill, and it was known that Marsh had gone to London, so the fags resolved to have a regular lark. They got a lot of things in from Ginger's, that's the pastrycook in College Street, and some bottles of raisin wine from the grocer's, and had a grand blow-out. After supper they turned to with the bolsters, and had a stand-up fight. Jemmy Squat and old Dinah went up once or twice to stop them; but they minded them no more than they would have minded you or me. All of a moment, just when the row was at its height, and old Dinah was scolding like mad, the door opened, and in walked Mother Wilson

herself, whom everybody believed to be fifty miles away. Dinah screamed and ran off, declaring it was a ghost, and the fellows threw down their bolsters, and looked foolish. Mother Wilson went about taking stock of the damages, and then flounced out of the room, declaring she would go to Mr. Marsh the first thing after breakfast."

"I suppose he 'd have made a great row," said Oliver.

"Yes, he 'd have had the seniors of the room swished, and the rest kept in to do a long imposition," assented Wilkie. "Well, the fellows agreed that that would be a great nuisance, and they 'd go and try to beg off. They went to Mother Wilson's room the first thing after chapel, and there they found Dinah in a greater rage than before. Mother Wilson hadn't been in Westonbury since the middle of the day before, and some one had been into her bed-room, and tumbled her things all over. There was her best cap, and shawl, and gown pulled out of her wardrobe, and lying all crumpled on the ground. Dinah vowed she 'd find out who had done it, and tell her mistress; but she thought better of it after a while, smoothed out the things and put 'em away, and held her tongue about the whole matter."

"And did she never find out who had played the trick?"

"Well, I guess she hadn't much doubt in her own mind about it, any more than the fags had; but they all judged it best to say as little as possible about it, and as for Corny, of course *he* held his tongue. But Ives, who was in the fags'-room at that time, agreed with me about it. We could both of us have sworn it was Mother Wilson herself, and no one else. He 's a wonderful mimic, that 's certain."

"Well, we must allow that too," said Poole; "but I don't much fancy, for my part, being made the subject of his jokes. Just look what a row he would have got me into, if I really had gone up to Prebendary Horne's to-morrow; and I certainly should have gone, if I hadn't happened to fall in with you."

"Old Horne's too good-natured to get any of the fellows here into a row," observed Wilkie. "Most likely he'd have laughed good-naturedly, and told you somebody had been playing a trick upon you."

"Well, even if he did," returned Poole, "I don't think it would be the pleasantest thing in the world to be laughed at in that fashion, particularly by a gentleman like Mr. Horne. I am strongly inclined to give Cobbe one or two taps over the head with my fist, to warn him not to pick me out as the butt of his wit again."

"Don't do that," said Wilkie, "no one ever takes offence with old Corny. You'd be sorry you had done it two months hence, when you came to know him better. No, take my advice in this matter, and we'll floor him with his own weapons; but first I should like to read his letter, which I haven't done yet."

He took up the letter accordingly, and perused it carefully, once or twice bursting out into laughter as he did so. "It is uncommon clever, I must say," he observed. "Of course it's all nonsense about Formby and the magistrates; but he really is rather a waxy old fellow, and does lay into the fellows sometimes. And Marsh is as little given to drink as any parson in England; but he has a very red face, and stammers

sometimes, so that a stranger really might fancy there was some truth in the story. You mustn't be angry, Poole; it is much too good a joke to be angry at."

"Well, I'll forgive him, if you wish it," returned Poole. "But what is it that you propose to do?"

"Just this. He doesn't in the least really mean you to go up to the Close to-morrow; that would quite spoil the fun. The fellows here, in general, would be savage if any impertinence were played off on Mr. Horne; and if it got to the monitors' ears, they would very probably give Corny a sound licking for compromising the school. What he'll do will be to leave you in ignorance of the truth up to the very last minute, and then tell the story against you. Now we'll sell him—catch him in his own trap."

"But how?" asked Oliver.

"Leave that to me. I'll manage it, I promise, if you will only do what I tell you."

The two boys consented, and no further reference was made to the subject that evening. On the following day, as soon as afternoon school was over, Charlie and Harry returned to No. 14, where they found Wilkie awaiting them; but Cobbe did not make his appearance.

"He won't be here for ten minutes or so, I expect," said Wilkie; "that will be quite time enough for us. Now, Poole, put your hat into the cupboard there, and get under the bed. You'll hear all the fun well enough there. Don't come out till we are ready for you."

Poole complied, and Wilkie drew the counterpane so as completely to hide his figure. He had been in concealment

about five minutes, when Cobbe burst into the room, to all appearance exceedingly put out.

"I wish that Woodward was anywhere else," he exclaimed, "he's always making blunders. He came and gave me a message just as school was up, telling me Manson wanted me—me particularly; and when I went to his house, I found Manson only wanted one of the Fourth Form; any one else would have done as well. But where's Poole? I suppose——"

He was interrupted by a tap at the door, and Pratt, one of the Fourth Form boys belonging to the house, came in. "Is Poole here?" he said, as he entered the room. "Here's a note which Squat asked me to give him. It came before school, but he forgot, I suppose, to deliver it."

"A note for Poole, hey?" said Oliver, taking it from Pratt, and examining it. "Why, I say, this must be from Mr. Horne too; it is just the same handwriting as the other. I wonder whether he can have written to alter——"

"You don't mean to say," exclaimed Cobbe, suddenly breaking in upon Oliver's speech, "you don't mean that that note hasn't been delivered till now! Why, I—why, you said, Pratt, that it had come before school, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Pratt; "so I understood Jem, that is."

"It's a shame," cried Cobbe; "and where is Poole gone to, pray?"

"Gone to?" repeated Oliver, "why, where should he be gone to, except up to Mr. Horne's house? Why, you yourself—you can't have forgotten what you advised him to do last night."

"You mean he is really gone up to Mr. Horne's house?"

gasped Cobbe. "You can't mean it—by Jove, you really can't."

"Why not?" asked Oliver, coolly.

"Why not?" repeated the other, angrily. "Why, couldn't any one that had a grain of sense have seen that it was all a joke? The idea of Horne really writing that letter! I couldn't have believed that any one would be such a flat as to think it."

"Take it coolly, Corny," said Wilkie. "I dare say Horne won't be very furious, and, unless Formby is there——"

"Formby there," repeated Cobbe; "what should take him to Horne's house?"

"Oh, don't you know?" returned Wilkie. "There is a meeting to-day of old Westonburies at Horne's house, and I think Formby, but certainly Sydenham and Collett, are to be there. By-the-bye, if the monitors really should be at Mr. Horne's when Poole pays his visit, and they hear of the trick——"

He was interrupted by another rap.

"Is Corny Cobbe here?" asked Jem Burnet, entering. "Oh, yes, here he is. Corny, Sydenham wants you in the monitors' study; you are to go to him immediately."

Cobbe turned as white as a sheet. He wasn't a coward by any means; but to be sent for by the head monitor into the monitors' study was the almost invariable preliminary to what was called a "school thrashing," and that was an infliction which might well wake a tremor in the bosom of the boldest.

"Sydenham—the monitors' study!" repeated Wilkie, in a

tone of concern. "You don't mean it, Jem. Why, what's up now?"

"I don't know, I am sure," said Burnet: "there are queer stories about. Some of the fellows say that old Horne has been insulted by one of the new fellows, and that it was done in the presence of the monitors—that is, of Collett and Sydenham; and they are awfully savage, and are going to give the new chap a tremendous thrashing for it. That's one story. Another is, that the new fellow declared he'd had a letter from Horne; and when this was shown to Collett, he said he knew quite well who wrote it, and that it was a shameful trick, and he'd pay the fellow out. But I don't suppose that Corny here had anything to do with it."

"Yes, but I had, worse luck," cried Cobbe. "I wrote the letter in Horne's name, but I hadn't the least idea that that fellow Poole would really go to the house; and I wrote a second letter to stop him, but that idiot Squatty forgot to deliver it. I say, you fellows, tell me how I am to get out of this?"

"I am afraid it is a bad business," said Burnet, looking grave. "It takes a good deal to put Sydenham's back up, but it is no joke when he really is provoked; and I am sorry to say I never saw him so angry as he seems now. He has sent for Corbet, too, with his whalebone. It looks awfully fishy. I don't know what to advise. What do you think, Jack? I should be in a blue funk myself, I can't deny that."

"Well," said Wilkie, "I think Corny, in the first place, had better put on his oldest jacket. Whatever he wears will

be pretty sure to be cut to ribbons, and there 's no use, at all events, in having one's *best* jacket spoilt; is there now?"

"Of course not," acquiesced Pratt; "and then Corny can stuff some copy-books between his waistcoat and his shirt, and put on one or two additional jerseys. They will lessen the pain of the blow in some slight degree, at all events; and I dare say Sydenham won't order the manager to give him more than thirty or forty cuts at most."

"Not *more* than forty, I should think," said Wilkie; "but you said, didn't you, Jem, that Sydenham considers it a very bad case? And then that fellow Corbet does lay it on so awfully hard, when he thinks the head monitor wishes it. It is quite disgusting to see."

"I am afraid Sydenham is in a rage," said Burnet. "He talks about a deliberate insult offered to Mr. Horne, just at the time when he was showing the school the greatest kindness and generosity. I must say I can't wonder——"

"What brutes you are," screamed Cobbe. "I didn't mean to insult Mr. Horne. I hadn't the least idea that Poole would be such a fool as to go to him. I declare I never saw such flats in my life! Can't any of you understand a joke?"

"Ah, Corny," said Wilkie, laying his hand upon his shoulder, "can't *you* understand a joke? Here, come out, Charlie, and don't laugh so loud another time when you 're in hiding."

Poole crept out from his place of concealment, the tears running down his cheeks with merriment. His appearance completed Corny's bewilderment.

"What on earth does this mean?" he cried. "Why, where has Poole come from?"

"From under the bed, where he has been almost ever since school was over."

"What! he has never been to Horne's? he has never spoken with Sydenham?"

"Make yourself easy, Corny, neither Horne or Sydenham know anything of the matter. But, I say, Corny, how is it you can't understand a joke? I declare I never saw such a flat in my life!"

Cobbe looked savage for one moment, but the next he burst into his usual merry laugh.

"Fairly sold this time, I must admit. Oh, Jack!

> 'Quid natum, crudelis tu quoque, falsis
> Ludis imaginibus?'

as Virgil says in the First Æneid."

CHAPTER VII.

THE next day the regular work of the half-year began, and the new-comers soon fell into the grooves in which the boys habitually moved. They found themselves able to do the work of the Upper Fourth fairly well, but not without taking pains. Cobbe's proposal was carried out, so far as it related to their learning their lessons together. The result was, on the whole, satisfactory to Corny, who allowed Charlie to undertake the part of interpreter in ordinary, and Harry to be the searcher of lexicon and dictionary; while he reserved to himself the post of general superintendent—that is, he sat by and listened. He was obliged, however, to do his own verses and themes, unless when he could, by some unusually urgent entreaty, or some happily-timed *bon-mot*, coax Poole into composing them for him.

Jack Wilkie and Jem Burnet proved to be very pleasant companions. The latter was located in the next room to them, of which a big Lower Fourth boy, called Dyke, was the only other occupant; and as he rarely opened his mouth (unless for the purpose of taking in food, for which reason he was commonly known as "Dumbie Dykes"), it was no wonder that Burnet found his chief companionship with the tenants of No. 14.

It was a time of the year when neither cricket nor boating were possible, and even football was not in vogue; but there

was plenty of fun, nevertheless. In the first week after their return there was a severe frost, which covered Earlsmere with a coat of ice thick enough to render it safe for all who were able to swim; and as Wilkie and Burnet were among the number, as well as the two Barstone boys, they were allowed to take their pleasure on the ice, which they did in the way of sliding, skating, and sledging, to their hearts' content. Then came a heavy fall of snow, and Jem Watt and the other school servants had to labour for an hour or two every morning to open a passage to school and chapel. The boys themselves were not disposed to journey beyond the school gates, but employed themselves in building up fortifications of snow in front of the boarding-house, which they alternately attacked and defended; whence also they assailed any luckless passers-in and out with volleys of snowballs, from which the only safety lay in speedy and ignominious flight.

Before the frost had quite taken its departure, Poole's and Oliver's month of grace, as new boys, was up, and they became liable to be fagged by the monitors; but this made little difference to them. There were only three Sixth Form boys at their boarding-house—Collett, Ryle, and Empson—and there were at least thirty boys in the three lower forms and the Lower Division of the Fourth to wait upon them. It was very seldom, therefore, that they were called upon to go on messages, or carry up coal or wood to the monitors' rooms. Moreover, two of the three house monitors, Collett and Ryle, were such general favourites with the boys, that it was regarded rather as a privilege than anything else to wait upon them.

Out of the boarding-house it was not quite the same. All boys under the Fifth Form were liable to watch-out at cricket for any of the Sixth Form, no matter to what boarding-house they might belong, or to play in the football matches, or to row monitors on the lake, when they chanced to be too lazy to row themselves. These matters were all arranged by a big Fourth Form boy, called the "School Manager," who was chosen by the monitors, as Κρατος and Βια were chosen by Vulcan, in the "Prometheus Vinctus," on account of their size and strength, to do his dirty work for him. In requital of these services, the "manager" was allowed certain privileges, which in general appertained to the Sixth only. He was allowed to go out of bounds—the ordinary school bounds, that is—without the companionship of a monitor; to wear his hat in the school and boarding-house precincts, and to fag the juniors when not waiting on the Sixth Form. The present manager, whose name was Corbett, had been in office for a twelvemonth or so, and performed his duties unusually well. He was, in fact, too stupidly good-natured to be spiteful to any one, and too stolid to pay any heed to the endless complaints sure to be made against any one holding his situation. In fact, as Sydenham remarked of him, he was a heaven-born manager, and it was a pity he could not stay at Westonbury for ever. Charlie and Harry were liable, of course, to be ordered down to the football-ground or the cricket-field by this functionary; and occasionally their paper-hunts or walks were interrupted by his interference. But this did not often happen, and they minded it very little when it did. It was no great hardship to be obliged to play

a game at football even with fellows bigger than themselves, and if it was coldish work to stand and watch-out at cricket on an early day in spring, still it was good practice, and a plucky catch or a good throw-up almost always procured the release of the junior from his durance.

In fact, the two lads would have been as happy as boys could be, if two things had not occurred to ruffle the smoothness of their lives. The first of these was the strange circumstance that Arthur Sydenham took no notice of them. The reader will remember how Colonel Poole had written word that General Sydenham had engaged to write to his son, and enlist his good offices in their behalf. They had not thought very much of this promise previously to their arrival at Westonbury; but they then discovered that General Sydenham's son was the hero of the school, and, like all such heroes, the centre of unbounded admiration and loyal attachment. It was not his personal prowess or his skill at school games, though tales of these were told round the boarding-house fires, worthy of a Crichton or a Monte Christo—which rendered him so general a favourite. It was his fine manly temper and kindness of heart, qualities as much appreciated by the masters as the boys. It will readily be acknowledged that the favour of a friend like this was a thing which the juniors at a public school would be very unwilling to forego, and that it was a terrible disappointment when day after day went by, and the great man vouchsafed them no notice.

"It is very odd," remarked Wilkie one evening, when the perfections of Sydenham had been the topic of the conversa-

tion; "it is very odd of him to take no notice of the fellows about whom his father has written to him. Sydenham thinks so much of his father. He used to talk about him, when he first came here, in a way that was quite a joke in the school. If I were you I would go and remind him. Why, there's lots of things a head monitor can do for a junior—leave out of bounds, leave from cricket and lake fagging, and I don't know what."

"I shan't remind him," said Poole, "whatever I might get by doing it."

"Well, but, Charlie," said Oliver, "write home and tell my father about it."

"I'd rather not," rejoined Poole. "If a fellow doesn't show you kindness out of free goodwill, I wouldn't do anything to make him show it."

"To be sure there's one thing," observed Cobbe: "if the General has forgotten to write, it would be useless jogging his memory. By the time a letter could get to India and an answer come back, Sydenham will have left."

"It's not certain he will leave," said Wilkie; "if he doesn't get the scholarship he'll stay another year."

"Ah, but he will get the scholarship," returned Cobbe. "Meyler may run a good second, but he won't beat Sydenham. No, he's safe to leave, and everybody will be sorry, unless it's Empson and his set."

"Parsons and his set, you should say," remarked Burnet. "I declare, to see him and Empson and Garland together, anybody would think he was the monitor and they the juniors. I met them yesterday walking together on the

Brandleigh Road, Parsons in the middle talking away, and the other two listening. I suppose the next thing we shall see, will be Parsons ordering Empson to run on his errands, and Garland to black his shoes; and both of them will obey his orders!"

"He will soon be ordering *us*," said Wilkie. "The Fifth Form examination list is just out, and he has taken up ten places—next to Armstrong. Such a thing hasn't been heard of for years. The fellows were saying that the brute would certainly be in the Sixth in a year, and perhaps even next half."

"I hope not," rejoined Burnet; "that would be a bad job indeed," a sentiment in which all the others concurred.

Parsons had given our two boys very little trouble since his first passage of arms with them. He belonged to a different room and a different form, and therefore seldom came in their way. Moreover, under the terror of Collett's threat, he would not have ventured upon any harsh measures against them; but they were well aware that he had not forgotten the grudge he owed them, and if he should attain to the dignity of the Sixth Form while they were still juniors, it would be a bad time for them.

The reader will wish to know something of the two just mentioned, who are among the prominent characters of this tale. As for Parsons, he was the son of a man who had made a fortune on the Stock Exchange, and wanted to push his son in society. With this view, he had sent the boy to a crack public school, counselling him, at the same time, to make the best use of the advantages thus afforded him.

Master Sam was an apt pupil enough, and contrived to form (as the reader has heard) an intimacy with two boys a good deal higher in the school than himself, both of whom had the repute of being the sons of persons of rank and consequence. He had further succeeded in establishing such an influence over both of them, that they were always ready to do what he wanted, and throw the shield of their monitorial power over him if needed, a circumstance which caused much speculation among the boys.

It was not difficult to account for his favour with Garland. The father of the latter was a man of high family, though rather narrow circumstances, the prevailing fancy of whose mind was that everybody ought to think for himself, and that nearly all the ills of life arose from the fact that people would take their ideas from other persons; whereas ideas to be of any value ought to be a man's own. "I shall bring up my boys, sir," he would say, "to think for themselves. No dictating to them what views they are to hold, sir, what plans they are to form. They, at all events, shall not tread in the pack-horse round of worn-out prejudices." Two occurrences, however, which took place when the lad was seven, and again when he was twelve years old, had the effect of a good deal modifying his views upon these matters.

Mr. Garland, sen., was a terrible sufferer from neuralgia in the eye and ear, which at times almost distracted him with pain. On one of these occasions, when he was tossing in great suffering on the sofa, Mrs. Garland encountered Master Steve, at that time a few weeks past his seventh birthday, carrying a gun in his hand, and making for the drawing-room.

"You ought not to carry guns about the house, Stevy," said Mrs. Garland, who was no philosopher. "How do you know that it may not be loaded?"

"It *is* loaded," replied the boy. "I saw Lawrence load it again after shooting the old cart-horse."

"It is loaded, do you say?" exclaimed the lady. "And what in the world are you going to do with it?"

"I am going to put poor papa out of his pain, as they put old Dobbin yesterday. I am sure it would be better for him to be shot than to suffer so!"

Mrs. Garland screamed and summoned the butler, by whom the boy was disarmed, while she herself hurried in to acquaint her husband with the result of Stephen's first exercise of private judgment. Mr. Garland did not retract his assertions, but it was observed that he was very strict in requiring all dangerous weapons to be kept out of his son's way, particularly when the fits of neuralgia returned, and was less urgent than heretofore in inculcating the necessity of independent thought. Nevertheless, when Steve was twelve years old, Mr. Garland summoned him one day into his study, and delivered himself of a long lecture in the usual style of his addresses. "Stevy," he observed, "was now twelve years old. It was time for him to choose his future line in life. Every one," he remarked, "must do work of some kind, but that work ought to be suited to the inclination and capacity of each, which none could determine so well as themselves. He should give Steve a month in which to consider this important question, and at the end of that time he should expect an answer."

Steve went out of the study looking considerably puzzled, and the air of perplexity lasted for nearly two days, at the end of which time he had quite recovered his equanimity. His father watched him with much satisfaction, and when the month was up, again called him into the study.

"Well, Steve, have you fully considered the matter I spoke to you about?"

"Yes, papa," returned Steve.

"And have you made up your mind what you will be? Remember, your education will be directed entirely to secure success in it."

"Yes, papa, I've quite made up my mind."

"That is well. What have you chosen to be, Steve?"

"If you please, papa, I will be a country squire, and keep a pack of foxhounds."

Mr. Garland did not report the answer to Mrs. Garland. He sat down and wrote to Dr. Formby, requesting him to receive his son as a boarder; and disregarded with most unphilosophical pertinacity Master Steve's representations that school would be of no use to him in the career he had selected. To Westonbury he was sent, and there he had been ever since. Whether or not the premature efforts to induce him to think for himself had exhausted his brains I am unable to say, but he certainly troubled them very little now. By mere mechanical performance of the routine work of the school he had mounted up, form after form, until he had reached the Sixth at last, but he found the work of it try him sorely. He was continually asking Parsons's help in his Greek Iambics and Latin Lyrics, which he could not

accomplish himself with even passable success; and it was no wonder that he should be willing to pay for the aid thus rendered, by readiness to bestow any privileges in his power on his useful assistant.

But Empson was a different character. He did not need Parsons's help in his school work, being his equal at least in ability. Nor could he want to borrow Parsons's money, of which the latter was known to be flush. Empson's purse was always well supplied, though he did not spend as much as the other monitors; he was, next to Sydenham, the best dressed fellow in Westonbury; and he was inclined to affect *hauteur* and exclusiveness. It was a puzzle to the boys what could give Parsons so much influence over him. In fact, Empson was altogether a mystery to the school. No one knew where he came from, or whither he went during the holidays. Jem Watt, when questioned on the subject, said that a man always called for Mr. Empson's luggage on the breaking-up day, and brought it back on the first day of the half, but he said he knew nothing of Mr. Empson, and had simply been sent from the office with the portmanteau. For a half-year or two there was a good deal of curiosity on the subject. But it was found to be impossible to get any information out of Empson, and when he got higher in the school, he administered one or two such thrashings to juniors, who were importunate in their questions, as effectually checked all outward expression of inquisitiveness about the matter, however much might be secretly felt.

But there was one boy in Westonbury who knew the secret, and that one was Parsons. It happened that one holiday he

was invited to pass a few days at a place called Shalcombe, distant some fifteen or sixteen miles from Westonbury. On the day of his arrival, Mrs. Layton, his hostess, was full of the sad case of a poor woman now lying in the union workhouse, a few miles off among the downs. She was on the point of driving to see her humble friend, and invited Parsons to accompany her. Having nothing else to do, he assented, and the carriage reached the workhouse early in the afternoon. The master, with whom Mrs. Layton wished to speak, was absent, but it was thought that he had only gone to his garden, and the porter offered to fetch him. Parsons took it into his head to accompany him, and the two proceeded down a lane at the back of the house, until they came to the door of a walled garden. The porter knocked several times, but no one answered the summons, though Parsons fancied he could see some one looking at them through a crack in the panel. "There is somebody inside," he said.

"Somebody inside?" repeated the man, "that must be Mr. Empson, or Mr. Richard."

"Empson!" exclaimed Parsons. "Is the master's name Empson?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "Mr. Richard Empson has been master here this ten years and more, and his son is named Richard after him."

Richard, Richard Empson, that was the name of the Sixth Form fellow, about whom there was such a puzzle! Could this be the explanation of it? Parsons's curiosity was a good deal aroused, and he was resolved to get a sight of this Richard Empson the younger, if he could manage it.

"You haven't got a key of the door, I suppose, have you?" he asked the porter. "I know Mrs. Layton is particularly anxious to see Mr. Empson before she goes."

"No, sir, I haven't no key," was the answer; "and, bless my life, you mustn't kick at the door in that way. He is a very particular person, he is, and will make a great noise about it if the lock is broke."

Totally heedless of these remonstrances, Parsons bestowed two or three such vigorous kicks on the impediment to his curiosity, that the lock gave way, and he burst into the garden. The old porter followed him in fear and trembling, half inclined to beat a retreat, but afraid that he would only increase Mr. Empson's wrath at what had occurred if he did so. As they entered, they caught sight of a figure not advancing angrily to meet them, as the janitor had anticipated, but flying at the top of his speed to the farther end of the garden. Here the boundary consisted of a stiff wooden fence, perhaps four feet high. The retreating figure endeavoured to clear this with a spring; but his foot slipped, and catching the top rail with his toe, he fell over into the ditch on the other side with a loud cry of pain.

"It's Master Richard," exclaimed the porter. "He never likes visitors, and I s'pose he's tried to get out of your way. But I'm afeard he's hurt hisself. That was a baddish fall."

"We'll go round and pick him up," said Parsons, who was now pretty sure his conjectures were right, but was resolved to leave no doubt on the subject. "He may not be able to get home without our help, you know."

Old Daws, as the porter was called, could not deny the

reasonableness of this, and accompanied Parsons round to the other side of the paling. There they found the sufferer —Richard Empson, the Westonbury monitor, sure enough —endeavouring to crawl out of the ditch, but with his ankle so severely sprained, that it was impossible for him to do so without help. He accepted the hands extended to him in dogged silence. Not a word was spoken on either side, until they had reached a summer-house near the garden door. Here Empson sat down, declaring that he felt too faint to proceed farther for the present. "Whom did you want, Daws?" he inquired.

"We was sent to try if we could find Mr. Empson," said the porter. "Mrs. Layton, of Lantree Park, wants to speak to him. I am very sorry, sir, about the door—'t wasn't I."

"Never mind about the door," said Empson. "My father has gone down to Watts' shop. You will find him there. This gentleman"—he did not give any intimation that he knew who Parsons was—"I dare say will stay here to look after me."

Old Daws obeyed, glad to escape so easily, and closed the garden door behind him. The two worthies looked curiously at one another, but neither seemed willing to begin a conversation. At last Empson spoke shortly and awkwardly.

"I don't know what has brought you here."

"I came with Mrs. Layton to see a pauper in the workhouse here. I had no idea you lived at it."

Empson's cheek flushed angrily. "It does not signify to you where I live," he said.

"Not a bit," assented Parsons.

There was another silence, which Empsom again broke. "And now I suppose you will go and tell everybody at Westonbury what you have found out?"

"I don't know whether I shall or shall not," said Parsons "I don't know what good it would be to me to tell it."

"No, nor I," returned Empson. "I shouldn't be likely to go back there, to have the fellows twitting me with living in a workhouse among paupers, and all that. I should just leave at once, and that would spoil your fun, I expect."

"I never said anything about any fun," said Parsons, quietly. "As I said before, I don't know what good it would be to me to say anything about this."

"No," said Empson, catching eagerly at what he at least supposed to be the other's meaning; "but it *would* be some good to you to say nothing about it. I am a monitor there, and you are a junior, and before long I shall be head of Marsh's house. I could do a good deal for you if I chose it."

"I shall be out of fagging in another half," remarked Parsons carelessly.

"Yes, but you won't have the right of going out of bounds, or of messing in a monitors' room, or get off playing football and cricket when you want to go somewhere else, and having games at billiards, and suppers at the 'Eel,' and a lot of other things of that kind."

"There 's something in that, I must allow," said Parsons.

"Very well. Suppose we make a bargain. You keep this to yourself, and I take you about with me out of bounds, you know, and allow you to mess in my room, and all that sort of thing. Would you like that?"

"I should like it particularly," replied Parsons, "and of course it isn't likely that I should tell anything unpleasant of a fellow, who treated me like that. It would not be to my interest, you know."

"That's true enough," said Empson. "Well, now you had better go back, or Mrs. Layton will be inquiring after you. We had better for the future never refer to what has happened to-day."

Parsons assented, and the bargain thus made, had hitherto been kept to on both sides; and so was formed the alliance between Empson, Garland, and Parsons, which had excited so much surprise and indignation among the boys.

The reader has learned, earlier in this chapter, that besides the vexation the Barstone boys felt at Sydenham's neglect of them, they experienced another and more grievous trouble. What this was, we now proceed to relate.

CHAPTER VIII.

PREVIOUSLY to the formation of Parsons's more aristocratic intimacies, his chief associates had been three overgrown juniors, named Sykes, Gabbett, and Barwell, who were the bugbears of the lower forms, compelling juniors to fag for them on the sly, to do their themes and verses, give them construes of their lessons, and back them up in any lie which they might find it convenient to pass off on the masters. Barwell's career had been cut short (though it can hardly be said untimely so) in the half-year preceding the present. He was in the habit of paying visits to a tavern on the Shalcombe Road, which lay out of juniors', though not out of monitors', bounds. Here he, Gabbett, and Sykes, and in earlier days Parsons also, would indulge in the aristocratic luxuries of skittles and purl, until, under the influence of the latter, they were sometimes scarcely able to make their way home. Once or twice they had been met by the masters on their return, but they always contrived either to dodge out of their way, or pass off some ingenious story, which, though hardly credited, could not be disproved, and for a long time they escaped with impunity. One day, however, their evil stars caused them to emerge from the "Cat and Fiddle" just at the moment when Sydenham and Ryle were passing along the road. Parsons had ceased to accompany them on these occasions, and Sykes and Gabbett caught

sight of Sydenham's white hat and blue necktie just in time to retreat into the house, and leap out of a back window; but Barwell was a few steps in advance of his companions, and came face to face with the monitors. Two or three questions, short and sharp, settled the matter. Sydenham had already been spoken to by Mr. Holbeach and Mr. Saunders on the subject, and was not to be cozened by any of Barwell's excuses. Corbett, the manager, whose office it was to administer the "school thrashings," in the instance of boys below the Fifth, was ordered to be in readiness on the following day, to bestow on Barwell "a school thrashing before twelve," as the phrase was; but Barwell did not choose to submit himself to it. He took himself off by the coach that same night to his father's house, and did not return to Westonbury. "A good riddance too," was the general commentary, both of boys and masters.

But Sykes and Gabbett remained. They were somewhat more cautious than before, in consequence of their companion's mishap, but in no way amended. The reader will hardly require to be told that the first-named was always known in the school as "Bill Sykes," notwithstanding that his real name was Joseph; the novel of "Oliver Twist" prevailing in their minds over the record of his baptismal register. The titular Bill was rather hard put to it for society after the departure of Barwell; but Parsons, though no longer as intimate with him as of old, did not give either him or Gabbett the cut direct. He was a better reasoner than to do so. He knew that they both, but Sykes particularly, could be of a good deal of use to him with the juniors

in any emergency that might arise, and it cost him very little trouble to be civil to them. Indeed, he would sometimes prevail on Empson to allow them to be their companions to the "Eel," and elsewhere. The monitor was very reluctant to permit it, and Garland never would agree—Sykes's, and even Gabbett's, position in the school rendering such companionship terribly *infra dig.;* but Parsons had his own programme to carry out, and Empson was every day falling more completely under his control.

Sykes was grateful after his fashion, and did his patron's dirty work faithfully. Early in the half he received a hint that Poole and Oliver had incurred Parsons's displeasure, and he went to work accordingly. He chose for the scene of his operations the Fourth Form school, in which the two divisions of the Fourth were occasionally heard together, when divinity or geography were taught. This room was never entered by the monitors, and he was safe, therefore, from their interference. During the severe frost, which necessitated the unusual luxury of a fire in school, his usual procedure was to place the boys in front of the grate, and hold them there until their trousers began to scorch, when he would draw the cloth tight, extracting howls of agony from his victims, notwithstanding their pluck and determination. But fortunately the fires were soon discontinued, and he was obliged to resort to some new mode of persecution. Declaring that he had heard a good deal of their ability as singers, he placed them on the tops of two high stools, which were ordinarily used for the purpose of opening and shutting the windows, and ordered them to sing some songs

for the amusement of the form, hoping that they would refuse, and so give him a pretext for thrashing them; but this altogether failed. The boys made no objection, and Charlie, who had a good voice and knew many amusing songs, obtained a great deal of applause. This did not suit their tormentor at all. He improved on his first demand by insisting on the two boys learning some songs of his selection, and among these were one or two which he felt sure neither of them would consent to get by heart, much less to sing. On the next occasion he caused them to mount to their usual pedestals, and then called for one of his favourites. Poole took no notice of the demand, except by a look of contemptuous disgust; but Oliver burst out into an indignant refusal, which was applauded by several boys who had seen the words of the song.

"Hullo, I say, just give us that again, young 'un," exclaimed Sykes; "I didn't quite hear what you said, and I should like to be sure I had made no mistake."

"I'll say it again as plainly as you like," shouted Harry Oliver, his face crimson with indignation. "I said no one but a blackguard would sing such a song, and no one but a blackguard would ask a fellow to learn it."

"You did say so, did you?" shouted Sykes, furiously.

"Yes, I did," returned Harry, hardily, whose excitement was too great to take any account of consequences.

"Then I'll just give you a lesson that will last you for the rest of the half, at all events."

He sprang up as he spoke, and made a rush towards the stool; but one of the bystanders skilfully interposed his foot,

and he came headlong to the ground. Starting up with a fresh access of fury to avenge this outrage, he found himself brought face to face with an antagonist upon whom he had not reckoned. This was Ben Dyke—of whom the reader has already heard—a heavy, quiet sort of boy, who had been several years at Westonbury; but not being gifted with more than a very moderate share of wits, was invariably at the bottom of any class in which he might be placed. At the beginning of each half-year he was elevated a certain number of places by new boys entering it; but before the end of the first week he had inevitably sunk, like a stone, to the bottom again, and there he remained in spite of every effort on the part of the masters to help him up. His unconquerable good humour made him a universal favourite, all sorts of tricks being continually played off upon him, without producing any other effect than a hearty laugh from the victim, or a good-natured threat of whalloping the offender. He was in general so silent that his schoolfellows absolutely forgot his presence, and would almost as soon have expected an infant in arms to put himself forward as Dumbie. Nevertheless, it was he who had caused Sykes's downfall, and the expression of his honest, heavy face, as he confronted the angry bully, showed that for once, at all events, he "meant it," as the saying is.

Sykes regarded him with a mixture of surprise and disquietude. He had never—indeed, no one had ever—seen Dyke fight, the simple reason for which was that he was a great deal too good-humoured to quarrel with any one. No one could say whether he knew anything about fighting,

though any one might see for himself that, if he *did* understand the use of his arms, he would be an awkward customer, even for a fellow as big and strong as Sykes. The latter, however, felt that, come what might of it, it was incumbent on him to demand some satisfaction of his assailant.

"What do you mean by tripping me up in that way?" he inquired, wrathfully.

Dyke turned over the matter in his own mind, apparently, before answering, as he did at last, "Oliver."

"And what on earth is it to you whether I thrash Oliver or not?" rejoined Sykes, in the same tone as before.

Ben studied the matter for a still longer space of time, and then replied, "Nothing."

There was a laugh of amusement from the bystanders, which did not appear to improve the other's irritation.

"Then I'll just trouble you not to interfere again," he said. "I shall make him learn what songs I like."

"No," rejoined Dyke.

"Do you mean that you will try to prevent me?" cried Sykes.

"Yes," said Dyke.

"Bravo, Dumbie!" shouted the boys, who were as much delighted at the interposition of their favourite, as a crowd of street boys are when Punch knocks down the hangman. "We'll all back you up. Dumbie for ever! Two to one on Dumbie!"

Sykes glared round him. To do him justice, he was no coward, and he felt that he could not, without disgrace, recede from the position he had taken up. Another minute,

and the challenge to fight would have been given, but fortune delivered him from his embarrassment. The cry of "Holbeach!" "Holbeach coming!" was raised by the boys watching at the school door. Charlie and Harry descended from their elevated positions, the boys rushed to their places in the class, and for the time all recollection of the fray vanished from the minds of those present.

Sykes was wise enough not to revive it. Several days—more than a week—intervened before the Fourth Form met again in double class, and he then allowed the matter to pass without notice. Other subjects of interest had engrossed the minds of the boys generally. Poole and Oliver, of course, were well contented to be let alone, and as for Dyke, half an hour after the occurrence of the affair, he had forgotten all about it, and was "hail fellow, well met" with Sykes just as he had been before. Corny Cobbe did indeed divert himself with the composition of a doggerel song, the refrain of which was:

> "Sykes, Sykes, bully Sykes,
> Got the sack from Dumbie Dykes!"

But it was just the beginning of the spring football season, which, though it was much briefer than that in the autumn —lasting, indeed, only five or six weeks—was, nevertheless, a matter of great interest with the boys, and they had little thought of anything else. So Corny's humour for once passed unnoticed.

But Sykes, though he desisted from open hostilities, did not forget his defeat. He set down a black mark in his

mental register against both Oliver and Poole, for though it was Harry who had called him by implication a "blackguard," both had set him at open defiance. Indeed, a few days afterwards an incident took place which made Poole much the heavier offender of the two in his eyes.

Although Parsons had continued, in some measure, his patronage to Sykes, he had ceased to give him the accustomed help in his composition and construing, which had formerly kept his head, so to speak, above water; and he was often driven to great straits to get his school work done. He durst not resort to the simple process of compelling smaller and cleverer boys to do it for him, under penalty of a sharp licking if they refused. He had practised this with excellent success in the previous half-year, for a considerable time. But one day Collett chanced to overhear a conversation between him and a junior in the same form, which induced him to come down with his whalebone upon Sykes after a fashion so extremely unwelcome to the recipient, that the remembrance of it lasted during the whole of Collett's stay in the school, and, however great might be his difficulties, he never resorted to that mode of overcoming them for the future. He was obliged to subsist, as it were, from hand to mouth in the performance of his form work, now picking up a construe from his neighbour, now appealing, *ad misericordiam*, to some senior boy, now wheedling a theme or a copy of verses in requital of some real or imagined service.

One day it chanced that the theme of the verse task was Phocion addressing his judges, the school lesson for the day having been taken from the life of that general in Cornelius

Nepos. This subject caused a very considerable amount of trouble, not only to Sykes, but to others also. Poor Jack Wilkie, in particular, could not make head or tail of it. Jack was always wont to eke out two or three verses at least in every exercise, after the same fashion as that in which guests at a dinner party endeavour to dispose of the awkward interval before the announcement of dinner—viz., by remarks on the state of the weather. It was once asked by a facetious Oxford writer, "whether the sun, moon, and stars were made for any other purpose than that of being introduced into a poem for the Newdigate;" but schoolboys make quite as much use of these luminaries, as do competitors for the English prize poem. Poor Jack, to all appearance, thought as deeply and as frequently of the state of the sky and clouds as Turner himself. Whether it was a river, an island, or a town which was to be the theme of his muse; whether he was required to describe a battle, a voyage, or a feast; the morning, the noon, and the night had their part in it, as surely as Charles I. had in poor Mr. Dick's memorial.

But upon the present occasion even he was puzzled to know how to make Phocion introduce the movements of the heavenly bodies in his address, and the attempt to versify Nepos's prose proved equally futile. After long entreaty, Poole was at length induced to come to the rescue, and suggested that the Athenian general should tell his judges that he was not afraid of the designs of his enemies, because he had the protection of the Gods. Wilkie caught at the suggestion, and presently, by help of Ainsworth's "Dictionary and Gradus," contrived to hammer out the line which had so

long been baffling him. Thereupon he read it out in triumph to his friends.

"Just done it in time," he said, "it's close upon five. Are you going to give your verses to Ryle Minor, Charlie?" he added, as he saw Poole get up to leave the room.

"Yes," returned Poole. "Marsh has gone to Oxford, you know, and our verses will go straight up to Holbeach without having been looked over. I suppose it will be the same with yours, won't it?"

"I believe so," said Wilkie. "Anyhow, if you'll give them to Ryle, I shall be obliged."

On the following morning, Mr. Norman, who heard the Lower Division of the Fourth Form had got about half-way through the day's exercises, when he paused for a moment, and, having carefully examined some papers, called up Wilkie.

"Wilkie, did you do these verses yourself?"

"Yes, sir," replied Wilkie.

"The whole of them?"

"The whole of them, sir."

"Did you do this line, then?—

'Non timeam insidias, nam Deus ipse juvat.'"

"Yes, sir," again answered Jack.

"Indeed," said Mr. Norman, drily; "then I conclude that you, Sykes, did not do *your* verses yourself. Where is Sykes?"

"Here, sir," said Sykes, heaving up his huge bulk.

"You did not do your verses yourself, I suppose?"

"Yes, I did, sir," rejoined Sykes.

"Did you do this line:

'Non metuam insidias, nam Deus ipse juvat'?"

"I did," returned Sykes.

"One of you two boys is telling me what is not true. The line does not occur in the Gradus, nor in any author with which I am acquainted. The coincidence can't be accident. One of you boys must have copied it from the other."

Both boys repeated their assertions.

"It's nonsense telling me that," said Mr. Norman; "and I must say that I think it is most likely that it was Wilkie who copied from Sykes. Sykes's verses, though they don't contain very much in them, are in general accurate enough." (This was true, the circumstance being due, however, to the corrections of Parsons, or others.) "But Wilkie's are very faulty, and in this present instance Sykes's line is correct, and Wilkie's wrong. I can't prove anything against either, but that's my impression. Anyway, Wilkie, you will write out the verbs '*metuo*' and '*timeo*' ten times each for your blunder, and give it me the next school-time."

Jack Wilkie, who was an honourable and truthful boy, though somewhat given to laziness, was a good deal disturbed at this occurrence, and detailed his grievance to his three friends as they sat over their tea that evening. "I don't mind writing out the verbs," he said, "but I don't like Norman to think me a liar."

"What does it matter what he thinks?" observed Corny Cobbe; "it all comes into the week's work."

"I don't think it does," said Jack. "I think if a fellow doesn't know repetition, or can't construe his lesson, Norman has a right to pitch into him; but I can't see that he is entitled to assume that a fellow has been telling him a lie without some proof of it."

"All right, Jack," said Charlie, "I quite agree with you there; and, by Jove, now I think of it, this line, about which there is all this row, is the one for which I gave you the English."

"To be sure," said Wilkie, "so it was, and I read it out to you when I had done it; I remember quite well now. That brute Sykes must have seen my verses lying about somewhere."

"Anyway, they were lying on the slab near Marsh's door for a long time that evening," said Cobbe. "I'll take my davy to having seen them there somewhere about six, when I went down to Mother Wilson's to get an order for a hat."

"And I saw Sykes coming out of Parsons's room a little after six," said Oliver.

"You did? Then I'll tell you what, Jack," said Poole, "I'm quite game to go to Norman and tell him I saw you do the line in dispute. I'll tell him so the first thing in the morning."

"Oh, I don't think I could ask you to do that, Charlie," said Wilkie. "That fellow Sykes is a beastly bully, and he has a spite against you already. I shouldn't like to get you into a worse row with him than you have already."

"He be hanged!" said Poole. "I don't care twopence for him or his spite either!"

Accordingly, the next morning, as soon as school had begun, Poole left his own seat, and, crossing the school, ascended the steps of Mr. Norman's chair.

"If you please, sir," he said, "I want to speak to you."

Mr. Norman looked at him in some surprise.

"Your name is Poole, I think?" he said. "What do you want?"

"I am told, sir, that there was a doubt yesterday as to whether Wilkie or Sykes did a line which was found in both their verse exercises."

"And what business is it of yours if there was?"

"Only," said our hero, a little abashed, "that I know it was Wilkie who did it. He asked me to give him an idea for his last line, and I did so. He turned the words into Latin, and then read the verse out to us. Oliver and Cobbe heard him read it out as well as I."

"You remember hearing him read out the word '*timeam*'?"

"Yes, sir, quite well."

"Then you heard him make a gross blunder, for which he deserved the punishment he has got. You may go back to your place."

Poole retired, feeling considerably snubbed, and inclined to be indignant at Mr. Norman's summary mode of settling things without inquiry; but on the following morning he was again sent for by the Lower Fourth master, who at the same time called up Sykes and Wilkie.

"Sykes," he said, "I wish to say a few words more to you about that line in your verses. I think you told me that you did every word of it yourself. You see the line I mean:

'Non metuam insidias, nam Deus ipse juvat'?"

"I did, sir," said Sykes.

"You put in the word '*metuam*' yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am sorry to say you are not telling me the truth. I have seen your tutor, Mr. Saunders, this morning, and he tells me that he distinctly remembers your bringing him the line with the word '*timeam*' in it, which he himself altered to '*metuam*.'"

"If he did I had forgotten it," said Sykes.

"Of course that is possible," said Mr. Norman; "but Poole here assures me that he saw Wilkie do the line somewhere about five in the afternoon, and that he and others heard Wilkie read it out. At what time did you take your verses to Mr. Saunders for the first correction?"

"Between four and five," said the unabashed Sykes; "a little after four, I think. You can ask Joynson, who is in the same room with me; or Gabbett, who——"

"There will be no need to ask any one," returned Mr. Norman, quietly. "I was walking out with Mr. Saunders all the afternoon in question, and know that he did not return to his house till six o'clock; he could not, therefore, have corrected your verses before five. Moreover, he tells me that you did not make your appearance till half-past seven, which fact he distinctly remembers, because he threatened to refuse your verses altogether, on the grounds of their being so exceptionally late. I presume, after this, you do not mean to persist in your assertion."

Sykes did not answer, except by a savage scowl which he

bestowed on Charlie, and a muttered threat of "serving him out."

"Wilkie," resumed Mr. Norman, "I am sorry I doubted your word. You deserved your imposition for your blunder, but not the suspicion of your truthfulness. I ask your pardon. Sykes, I shall order your name to be taken to Dr. Formby for telling a falsehood."

Sykes did not care much for the flogging he got, his skin having become, through repeated applications of the birch, as tough as a rhinoceros's hide. Still less did he care for the disgrace attached to his name, his moral hide being even tougher than his bodily; but he did care for what *he* considered disgrace—viz., the having been now twice floored by fellows, both of whom he could thrash with his little finger. He did not trouble himself much about Wilkie, who, he knew well enough, would have acquiesced in his discomfiture, if it had not been for his cleverer and more energetic friends. Against these he secretly vowed vengeance, and Jack Wilkie had only judged him rightly when he said that he would be sure to pay off any grudge he might entertain. Poole and Oliver, however, were not much daunted at the prospect. Several weeks had now passed on, during which they had got thoroughly used to the ways of the school, and they wrote cheerful letters home to Barstone, which gladdened the hearts of the good people there.

CHAPTER IX.

SYKES'S opportunity of revenge came sooner than he expected. A day or two after the beginning of the football matches, Corbett had so severe a fall as to strain one of the tendons of his back, and the school doctor sent him home for the half-year, intimating, at the same time, that he doubted his being able to return to Westonbury for another twelvemonth. It was necessary to choose another manager, and that without loss of time, as the matches were at a standstill for want of one. But the vacancy occurred at an unlucky time. Sydenham had been sent for home, in consequence of the sudden illness of his sister; and Stone, the third senior monitor, was up at Oxford competing for a scholarship. The election to the managership was in the hands of the five head monitors, who (as the reader has already been told in Dr. Formby's letter to General Sydenham) constituted a kind of council to which various matters of school interest were referred. The five electors therefore were now Collett, Meyler, Holloway, Empson, and Barton. Of these, Meyler was a careless and selfish, though extremely clever lad, who could with difficulty be induced to trouble himself at all about the affairs of the school; and Barton was invariably guided by one consideration, and that was opposition to Sydenham and Collett, of whom he was bitterly jealous.

Parsons at once apprehended the situation, and saw that

it would be possible to secure the post for his friend and *protégé*, Sykes. He accordingly induced Empson not only to vote for Sykes, but to canvass Meyler and Barton also. Empson was not unwilling to fall in with his views. Independently of the hold which Parsons had over him, it would suit him extremely well to have as school manager a fellow who was so much under his influence as Sykes would be. He accordingly bestirred himself, and had no great difficulty in securing both Meyler's and Barton's votes. Sykes's election was vigorously opposed by Collett, who was backed in his resistance by Holloway, a very quiet but right-minded lad. They demanded that the election should be put off until the return of Sydenham and Stone; but on referring to the records of former elections, it was found that it had invariably been the practice to choose the new manager, if possible, before the departure of the old one; but if that could not be done, at all events immediately afterwards. Collett was obliged to give way, and Sykes was elected by a majority of one, greatly to the disgust, not only of the juniors, but the monitors also. Collett was so greatly annoyed, that, on the return of Sydenham three or four days afterwards, he urged him to exercise the right, which he had as head monitor, of dismissing Sykes, and ordering a new election.

This, however, Sydenham would not consent to do.

"I don't like him any better than you do, George," he said; "but as he has been legally elected, though by something of a fluke, he ought to be allowed a chance. I'll keep my eyes upon him, though; and if he plays any snobbish tricks, I'll be down upon him, you may depend upon it."

Unluckily for himself, Sykes had no idea of this resolution on the part of the head monitor, and he entered upon his new dignity without any misgivings.

Charlie Poole soon found that however dull Sykes might be at Latin verses, shortness of memory on general subjects was not among his failings. All sorts of unpleasant duties were continually imposed upon Charlie, which were rarely assigned to any one above the Third Form, and never to one in the Upper Division of the Fourth. He was sent upon distant messages, which sometimes seemed to be made up merely for the purpose of dispatching him upon them; and the time generally chosen for these was when he wanted to go out for a walk, or join his companions in a paper-chase. If a monitor desired any particularly disagreeable service performed, Charlie Poole was pretty sure to be the one selected for it. The task of greasing the football, which was especially disliked by the boys, and generally given to the two or three juniors of the lowest form, was repeatedly imposed upon him; and once or twice he was ordered a sharp thrashing by Empson or Garland, on the pretext of the job not having been properly performed—commands which were executed *con amore* by the new manager. This at length became so notorious as to excite very general indignation among the Upper Fourth boys, who advised Poole to appeal to Sydenham, representing that the head monitor would be sure to hear him and do him justice. But this Charlie steadily refused to do. He was "not going to show," he said, "that he cared twopence for what Sykes, or any brute like him, might choose to do; and as for Sydenham,

since he hadn't chosen to pay any attention to his father's letter, he was not going to thrust himself on his notice."

So matters went on for several weeks. At last the end of March approached, with which the spring football season terminated. The two final matches were usually played on the thirtieth and thirty-first—the three boarding-houses on the north side of the quadrangle against the three on the south, on the former day, and the monitors against the school on the latter. The six boarding-houses, it may here be mentioned, were on the one side West's, Holbeach's, and Sinclair's, and on the other Marsh's, Norman's, and Saunders's. As the players on each side were twenty-one in number, seven were chosen from each house. The lists, drawn up and signed with the manager's name, were exhibited always on the evening before the match, on the doors of the various boarding-houses; and to the great astonishment of the boys, on coming out of school on the evening of the twenty-ninth, it was found that the seventh player selected from Marsh's house was Charlie Poole.

"What in the world have they done that for?" inquired Wilkie, as the four friends sat down to tea in their room. "Why, Charlie, you can't have played in half a dozen matches, I should think; and Sykes has passed over fellows who have played, I am pretty sure, for two seasons. There's Gabbett, and Burrows, and Hewlett—and only think! why, there's Dumbie. Did you ask Sykes very particularly to put you in the match?"

"I?" said Charlie; "no, I should think not indeed. Fancy my asking the brute anything. I have never said a

word to him on the subject. But I judge there is no doubt as to what he wants. He wants me to go and beg off, and then he'll have another opportunity of saying all kinds of things about my funking, and all that. But he has reckoned without his host there."

"Well, I don't know, Charlie," said Cobbe. "I should not call it funking to want to be out of such a match as the North and South, when a fellow knows hardly anything of the game. Nearly all the biggest monitors and Fifth Form fellows play in it, and anybody might be awfully hurt who wasn't used to the charges. Just fancy your coming right against Garland, or some other hulking Sixth Form fellow. You would be what Virgil says of Troilus:

'Infelix puer atque impar congressus Achillei.'"

"Never mind Virgil," interposed Wilkie; "but really Cobbe's right. I have known arms, and legs too, broken in that match, and much bigger fellows than you a good deal hurt. I expect that spiteful brute recollects it too."

"Very likely indeed," said Charlie; "but, as I said before, he'll find himself mistaken, if he thinks I am going to cry off. I'd break both my legs, and arms too, rather than let him crow over me that way."

The sentiment was too much in accordance with the pluck and determination of schoolboys to be further objected to, and on the day of the match Poole presented himself, ready prepared for action, along with the other combatants, when the hour of battle arrived. His demeanour caused the new manager no little perplexity. He had reckoned most cer-

tainly on the submission of his enemy, and had pleased himself with the notion not only of enjoying his alarm and disquietude, but of obtaining from him some solid advantages in the way of getting his exercises done, and his impositions written out by Poole, in consideration of the removal of his name from the list, and the substitution of Dyke, who, as Sykes was well aware, ought to have been the champion chosen. It was too late, however, for him to interfere now. His hope was that Charlie's appearance would not attract any notice; or if he should sustain any injury, that the blame would not be imputed to him. He did not, however, half like the look of things. Sydenham, whom he dreaded beyond anybody living, and who did not often attend those of the football matches in which he took no part, was present on this occasion, looking with all his eyes at what was going on. While the ground was being cleared of spectators, and the captains of both sides were arranging their forces after the most approved tactics of the game, Dyke came up, accompanied by Burnet, his room-fellow, and drew Poole on one side.

"I say, Charlie," said Burnet, "Dumbie and I have been talking this over."

"That is, *you* have been talking, Jem, and Dumbie listening," suggested Poole.

"Well, never mind. You oughtn't to have been put down to play in this match. Sykes has two reasons for doing it—first, he wants to spite Dumbie, for taking your part in the row about the singing; and, secondly, he wants to spite you. So he leaves him out and puts you in. Now,

this isn't an ordinary match, and you've never seen it. There's generally very fierce play, and unless a fellow is pretty strong and well used to it, he is very likely to come to grief rather badly. There's several fellows on their side —Maxwell and Garland of Norman's, and Robson and Greaves of Sinclair's—who, when their blood is up, don't mind who may come in their way, or how hard they may kick. I really think you had better not play. We'll go with you to Sydenham if you like it, and ask his leave for you and Dyke to change places. I'm pretty sure he would allow it."

"Thank you, and Dumbie too," said Poole. "It's very kind of you, and I am much obliged. I have no more doubt than you have, that Sykes has put me down to play in this match merely out of spite. But I am not going to be cowed by him, or ten others like him. As for kicks, I shall take my chance along with the others." So saying, he moved up to join the general group of "Southerners" as they were called, who were just about to commence the encounter.

Dyke shrugged his broad shoulders. He and Burnet withdrew from the battle-field, and the next moment the signal for the onset was given.

The match between the Northerners and Southerners was in general one of the keenest contests which took place throughout the football season; and on the present occasion the determination to win on both sides was more resolute than in previous years. The "Southerners"—as those belonging to the three boarding-houses of Marsh, Holbeach, and Saunders were called—had, on the whole, the stronger team, notwithstanding the inferiority of Charlie Poole to the

other players. But then, on the other hand, in the ranks of the North there were three or four, of whom Dyke had made mention in his conversation with Charlie, who, in respect of strength and skill, had no equals among their opponents. Their powerful exertions for a long time more than counterbal nced the general superiority of the South. The ball was continually kicked up to the goal at the Northern end, and then driven back by the weight of Maxwell and Garland. Then these would be overborne by the force of numbers, and the ball again urged Northwards; when the progress would be arrested by a tremendous charge from Greaves, which would burst through the dense array of the enemy, and carry the tide of war to the South. These manœuvres were enacted again and again, until even the lungs and sinews of sixteen or seventeen began to feel the strain. The school looked on, applauding their favourite champions as only boys can applaud. Charlie Poole in particular was the "observed of all observers." Oliver, Burnet, and Wilkie, all of whom had been indignant in the highest degree with Sykes for his spiteful manœuvre, had very soon lost all recollection of the risk to which their companion might be exposed, in the keen interest which they took in the variations of the conflict, and their admiration of Charlie's pluck. Considering the latter's want of training and inexperience in the game, he was playing extraordinarily well. In the "hustles," as they were called, where the ball was thrown down in the midst of some thirty combatants, half of whom endeavoured to drive it one way, and half the other, he bore his part manfully, paying no heed apparently to the heavy kicks

which he received from one or the other in the encounter; and even in the "charges," where much more skill, as well as activity and strength, were required, he several times obtained the plaudits not only of his own particular friends, but of impartial spectators into the bargain.

Sykes was standing by looking on, with very evident feelings of disappointment and surprise. So passed the first forty minutes of the match. As it approached its conclusion, the interest on both sides rose, if possible, still higher, and the exertions of both parties more desperate. Three goals had been scored for the Southerners and two for their adversaries. The one side laboured hard to maintain their superiority, the other to recover their lost ground. It seemed as if the former must be the ones to succeed. Most of the Northerners were fairly beaten, and their two or three principal champions found it more and more difficult to maintain the struggle against such overwhelming odds. The ball was once more driven up to the North goal by half a dozen of the stoutest Southern party, when Greaves—"Iron Greaves," as he was called—who had been lying by for the last minute or two, once more made a desperate rally. He tore up from the extremity of the field where he had been standing, and burst through his opponents, skilfully carrying the ball before him. It was done so rapidly that none of the Southerners were in time to stop him. One after another hurried up, but too late. Amid thunders of applause from his own party he approached nearer and nearer the Southern boundary, until there interposed only one of his adversaries, and he quite a little fellow, between him and the goal. The

boy in question, however, who had been staying behind to re-fasten a boot-lace, which had got loose, no sooner saw Greaves approaching than he rushed gallantly to meet him. Heedless of the inequality of the encounter, the Southerners shouted encouragement to their champion. "Bravo, Charlie! well done, Poole!" resounded through the field. The next minute the boys met in full career, and with the result that might be expected. Greaves was upwards of six feet high, strongly and heavily built. Charlie Poole was under five feet, and of a slight figure even for that height. It is probable that Greaves, in his hurry and excitement, had not a clear sight of the antagonist who had thus ventured to encounter him, or he would have checked himself. As it was, Charlie was thrown violently back on his head, and turned completely over, Greaves falling heavily upon him. The latter sprang up the moment afterwards, and continued his career, quite unaware of the injury he had inflicted. But Charlie lay on the spot where he had fallen, bleeding and insensible. Some of the bigger boys perceiving his condition, ran up to the rescue. They lifted him in their arms, and carried him to one of the school seats, where they endeavoured to restore him to consciousness, but without success. His eyes were closed, his teeth fast locked, and his features pale and rigid as those of a corpse. The boys were greatly frightened.

"Oh, he is dead, he is dead!" exclaimed Oliver, bursting into tears as he hung over him. "Carry him up to Marsh's —send for Mother Wilson." "Somebody run to Dr. Milford." "Fetch some water." These and a dozen other suggestions were bandied about from one to the other, until

Sydenham and Collett, who had been looking on from the farther side of the field, came up.

"You had better stand clear of him," said the head monitor, "and loosen his shirt-collar. Ives, go and fetch a glass of water from the nearest house. He is only stunned, I think, and will soon come to again." These words were presently verified, to the great satisfaction of Charlie's friends. Our hero opened his eyes, and stared round him in perplexity and wonder. In a minute or two he had recovered so far as to drink a few mouthfuls of water, and endeavour to stand on his legs. But he was too much exhausted for this, and presently, with the help of Cobbe and Burnet, he hobbled homewards, his two friends supporting him on either side.

"A good job it's no worse," remarked Sydenham, as he eyed our hero's retiring figure. "Who is that fellow? He is as well plucked a young chap as I have ever set eyes on. But his face is new to me."

"His name is Poole," said Collett; "and he belongs to my house—Marsh's."

"Poole," repeated Sydenham, "I didn't know there was any one of that name in the school. How long has he been here?"

"He came rather more than two months ago," said Oliver, "along with me."

"At the beginning of the half, in fact," said Sydenham. "And what is your name, pray?"

"Oliver," was the reply. "We come from Barstone, in E——shire."

"Oliver! Barstone!" repeated Sydenham. "Why, by Jove,

you must be the fellows about whom my father wrote to me during the holidays. But you were not to come till after Easter, I was told."

"I believe it was so intended," said Oliver; "but Formby wrote to my father just at the end of the holidays to say he could take us sooner than he had expected."

"I am sorry I didn't know it," said Sydenham. "I'll come and see you and Poole by-and-bye; but I've got something to see to first. I want to know how it is that Poole's name was put down to play in this match. Fetch the manager, some one."

"I'm glad you're going to ask about that," remarked Greaves, who had come up as soon as he had heard of the damage Poole had sustained. "I am sorry, of course, for having hurt him, particularly as he showed so much pluck; but if such small fellows are put in I don't see how it is to be helped. I suppose he has played in the matches often before."

"He has never played in any match till to-day," said Wilkie. "I heard him say so this morning."

"The plague he hasn't?" said Greaves. "What does this mean?"

"We shall see soon," remarked Sydenham. "Here comes the manager."

Sykes came up, trying to put a good face upon it, and accompanied at a little distance by Empson and Parsons. But in spite of their support, he looked particularly uncomfortable.

"Sykes," said the head monitor, "what do you mean by

putting a little fellow, who has been only a few weeks here, to play in the North and South match? Speak louder," he added, as Sykes mumbled a few inarticulate words about a mistake and a confusion of names. "You call it a mistake, do you? It would have been an awkward sort of mistake if this fellow's neck had been broken, as it very likely might have been."

Sykes made no answer. Silence was his best policy; but Sydenham was not inclined to allow it to succeed. "What do you mean by its being a mistake?" he resumed.

There was a silence again, which was at last broken by Dyke, who exclaimed, after his usual fashion, "No mistake!"

"Ah, you are there, are you, Dyke?" said Collett. "And you've not been playing in the match, have you?" he added, looking at his dress.

A shake of the head was the response.

"And yet you are a good player. Why didn't Sykes put your name down?"

"Spites me," said Dyke.

"And why did he put Poole's instead?"

"Spites him," said Dyke.

"*Locutus bos*," observed Sydenham. "Pray can you tell me also, why Sykes wanted to spite Poole?"

"Wouldn't sing beastly songs," answered the oracle.

"And why did he spite you?"

"Backed Poole up," was the response.

"Short and sweet," remarked Stone, who had just joined them.

"Well, I believe it is as true as it is short," said Collett.

"Armstrong told me about it soon after it happened. He heard of it, I fancy, from his cousin, young Cobbe. That was one reason why I opposed Sykes's election."

"And there was no need for a second," added Sydenham. "Well, that matter is past and gone, but Sykes deserves to catch it for this, and I shall take care he does."

Parsons and Empson had hitherto stood by in silence, Parsons not venturing to interfere, and Empson apparently unwilling; but at this point of the conversation the latter moved forward.

"The school manager cannot be thrashed," he said. "That has always been the rule as long as I can remember Westonbury, and I believe ever since the office was instituted. I don't know that it is quite fair to believe what is said against the manager by juniors, who are sure to have their grudges of one kind or another. I say nothing on that point, but——"

"But I shall say something," interposed Sydenham. "I have heard nothing against Sykes but what has been said in his presence, and to which he has had an opportunity of replying if he had chosen. But I will have no mistake on this subject. Sykes, you have heard what Dyke said, and what Collett reports Cobbe to have said. Do you deny the truth of their stories, and do you wish to have the matter inquired into?"

"I don't want any more bother," growled Sykes.

"That is to say, you *did* keep Dyke out of the match, and did put Poole in, for the reasons Dyke alleged?"

"They may say so if they like," was the reply.

"Very well. Now, then, Empson, go on with what you were saying before you began to talk about unfairness."

"I have no more to say than that a school manager cannot be thrashed by a monitor, even the head monitor. I suppose you, Sydenham, who are always in favour of old customs being kept up, are not going to break them yourself."

"You are quite right, I am not. But the same old custom gives the head monitor the power of annulling the election of a manager, and making a fresh one. I now exercise that power, and dismiss Sykes. George, it was Dyke, wasn't it, that you proposed as manager in February?"

"Yes," said Collett. "Holloway and I wanted Dyke to be made; and so, I believe, did most of the fellows."

"Very well. What do you say, Stone, to choosing Dyke?"

"I always wished it," said Stone; "and was very sorry when I came back from Oxford to find he had not been chosen."

"Then four out of the five, at all events, agree in electing Dyke now. I 'll speak to Meyler this evening, and am pretty sure he won't complain of what we have done. Well, Dyke, how should you like to be school manager?"

It had always been the special ambition of honest Dumbie's heart to hold the office in question, and his satisfaction was so great that he absolutely unclosed his lips so far as to utter a complete sentence.

"I should like it particularly," he said.

"That's settled, then," said Sydenham. "Remember, all of you, that Dyke is manager from this day. Sykes, I consider your dismissal to be enough for this time. Try this

kind of thing on again, and I 'll make an example of you that won't soon be forgotten."

Sykes turned white with mingled fear and rage, and slunk off out of sight.

"Hurrah for old Dumbie Dykes!" shouted Wilkie. "Three cheers for the new manager!"

The boys gave them lustily; and some of those belonging to Marsh's house, recalling the words of Corny Cobbe's song, composed on the occasion of the row in the Fourth Form school, produced it anew, as particularly suitable to the present imbroglio. It took amazingly with the juniors, and for a week or two afterwards the school passages and quadrangles echoed to the refrain—

"Sykes, Sykes, Bully Sykes,
Got the sack from Dumbie Dykes."

CHAPTER X.

ARTHUR SYDENHAM made noble amends for his unconscious neglect of his father's *protégés*. On the evening of the football match he sent for them into his study, and had a long talk with them. The head monitor, it should be premised, had a chamber to himself, adjoining the monitors' library, containing a fireplace, a large window, and a bookcase completely lining one wall. So comfortable was it, that most of the head monitors, when they exchanged it for freshmen's rooms at the Universities, found their new accommodation to be by no means an improvement upon the old. During Sydenham's tenure of office, the study looked particularly neat and cosy. The furniture, simple, but handsome and sound; the large library completely filling the bookcase; the two or three really good engravings on the walls; the vase of wild flowers on the mantelpiece, which it was a labour of love with his fags to keep always freshly supplied, produced a *tout ensemble* which so awed our two boys, that for a long time they could only answer questions in monosyllables. But by degress their shyness wore off under the charm of his kind and pleasant manner, and they told him all about themselves and their doings since their arrival at Westonbury. He was much amused at their narrative of Cobbe's exploits, whom he knew well as an eccentric genius, but whose escapades he advised them neither to imitate nor to take part in.

"A fellow like that," he said, "is very entertaining as far as other fellows are concerned, but seldom does himself any good, and generally gets, sooner or later, into some serious scrape." He greatly commended them for their refusal to learn Sykes's songs. "It 's blackguards like that," he said, "that give public schools a bad name; and it is a mistake to think that even monitors can always get at the mischief they do. I wish you had come and told me or Collett all about it. I know it 's thought sneaking in the school to do so, but it oughtn't to be. Until the feeling on the subject changes, the only thing is for fellows to refuse as you did; and after all probably, if he had given you any very savage licking, it would have reached our ears. I think you have done very well so far. Now, you know, I dare say, that I can let you off a good many things, as head monitor. I can give you leave from cricket and boat-fagging, but I advise you not to take it. A fellow should learn both cricket and boating, and he can learn neither so well as by working at them under fellows who are good hands at them, which is what fagging really is. If you like it I will make you two members of my boat's crew. There is a four-oar boat in which I row sometimes myself, with Collett, and Stone, and Ryle, and sometimes lie in the bows and read, while my crew row me about. I have two vacant places, which I was just going to fill up, as the boating season is now about to begin. Should you like it?"

Colouring with eager delight, the two boys answered that they would like nothing so much, and that they already knew how to row.

"Very well, that shall be so, then. I will tell Hutton, Lyster, and Clerk, who are the three remaining of last year's crew, about it. Armstrong and Greenwell were the other two, but they are in the Fifth now. Well, of course, being in my boat will exempt you from all other boat-fagging, and when I am not going out myself, you can always take the boat. Then I can give you leave to go beyond juniors' bounds; which will allow you to take several very jolly walks which the other juniors can't. But, if I do so, you must give me your promise that you won't go to the 'Silver Eel,' or the 'Horse-shoe,' or any other places where some of the fellows, monitors unluckily among them, are in the habit of playing skittles and billiards, and drinking beer and brandy and water, and that kind of thing. I should thrash any junior pretty sharply, whom I caught doing it, and I couldn't have it done under the colour of my leave."

Charlie and Harry hastened to assure him that they would most strictly observe this condition, and then, after a little more talk, Sydenham shook hands with them, and wished them good night. The boys returned to Marsh's as if they trod upon air, so delighted were they with their newly-acquired patron. Lavish were the encomiums bestowed upon him in No. 14 that evening, and glowing were the pictures of his merits transmitted to Barstone by the mail on the following day. A schoolboy seldom has more than two pigments on his palette — *couleur de rose* and black; and even these are seldom intermingled in the same portrait. Alas! in later life we learn to put the black shading only too correctly into the pictures even of those we love best!

The boys had a glorious April and May. Often in after years when these two much-abused months were on the *tapis*, they used to wonder whether they really were different in the first year of their schoolboy life, from what they had been ever afterwards. The suns were warm, but could they ever remember thinking them hot? the winds were fresh, but when were they complained of as easterly? the climate doubtless was continually changing, but was not every change delightful? Under Sydenham's auspices they soon learned to keep accurate time and swing, and were pronounced by Hutton and Clerk to be, for new fellows, "uncommon dabs" at it. They took their parts in the cricket-field too, and were soon able to back-stop a sharpshooter, and hit dexterously to leg, and swipe a half volley, and all other accomplishments of the noble game of bat and ball. But the water was their especial delight, and they were never tired of the spurt across the Mere from Ferris's Point to the Earl's Island, or the longer row through the "strait," as it was called, uniting Earlsmere with the large lake of Lyndmere, and even some way into Lyndmere itself; where the monitors, but not the juniors, were permitted to row.

It was about the end of the first week in June, when Jack Wilkie one evening made the announcement that his sister's wedding-day was fixed for that day fortnight, and that old Formby, after some grumbling (as Jack phrased it) had given him leave to go home for it. "He won't let me sleep out more than one night, though, the old beast," he said; "but I shall come in for the wedding breakfast, and that will be something tip-top, I can tell you. The governor is going to

come it strong this time. Breakfast two guineas a head—not a tizzy less—from a fellow called Mockford, a slap-up confectioner at the West End, and such wines!—they 'll be something to remember, I guess."

"You don't happen to want another best man, do you?" asked Cobbe. "I don't know your sisters, Jack;

'Nulla tuarum audita mihi, neque visa sororum,'

as Virgil says. But under the circumstances, I would waive etiquette."

"Much obliged, Corny. I am afraid, not even I, John Wilkie, Esq., brother of the bride, am to have the honour of being best man. The bridegroom chooses his own man, and is unhappily blind to my merits. But I 'll tell you what, you fellows: I 'll see if I can't lay hold of some of the things at the breakfast, and bring them back with me. It would improve our teas for a long time to come, wouldn't it?"

"It would," said Cobbe, "and I hardly know how to be sufficiently thankful for the proposal.

'Grates persolvere dignas,
Non opis est nostræ,'

as Virgil says in the First Æneid. Be sure you make a good selection, Jack, and our benediction go with you."

Wilkie departed on the appointed day, and returned in due course, full of the wedding festivities, which he pronounced to have been, in the phraseology peculiar to boys, "prime fun, bang up, and no mistake."

"And the eatables?" inquired Corny, proceeding at once to the main point. "You did not forget them, Jack?"

"I did not," responded Wilkie. "I had to come away almost immediately after the breakfast. Nevertheless I pouched a lot of things. There was a raised pie and a venison pasty, neither of which had been touched; a large cut of wedding cake; a basket of apricots and another of grapes—all these I packed in the hamper you see there; and two bottles of dry champagne into the bargain. The butler was disposed to make a row about that, but I came round him."

"You are a gentleman, Jack, and so, in his way, is he. This evening, this very evening, we will drink his health, 'veteris Bacchi,' as——"

"Well, wait a moment," said Wilkie. "I 've just been thinking this matter over. You know the day after to-morrow is a saint's day, John the Baptist. Well, there will be the long leave from lock-up, lasting from eleven to six. There 's nothing but dinner at one, and no fuss is made about our not coming to that. We could hire a four from Ferris's, and take the hamper with us to the 'Earl's Refuge,' and make our dinner there. What do you say to that?"

"I say it is an admirable idea, Jack. I was going to dine with Rolles at Briggs's on the twenty-fourth; but who is Rolles, and what is Briggs, that they are to interfere with such a scheme?"

"It is a capital notion," assented Poole; "but I think I can improve upon it. Sydenham and the rest of the eleven are going to dine with Horne on that day at Craybrook—his living, you know. Well, that being so, we can have the use of Sydenham's four-oar, and we can ask Jem Burnet to make the fifth of the party. What say you to that, Corny?"

"I say, let Jem be forthwith asked. I augur he will not say 'No.'"

Burnet did *not* say no, and on "the Baptist's fair morrow" —a day happily corresponding to its description—as soon as morning chapel was over, the five friends set out, carrying with them their fishing-rods, together with the contents of their precious hamper, which had been judiciously transferred to fishing baskets for more easy transport. These were soon placed on board the "General," as Sydenham's four-oar had been named in compliment to his father; the oars were got out, and the rowers took their places. Burnet, as the oldest and most experienced, rowed stroke; Charlie and Harry occupied their usual places of No. 2 and bow, and Wilkie was No. 3, while Cobbe, who knew little of rowing, sat and steered.

They had a delightful row. There was a slight breeze, enough to cool the air, but not to ruffle the water; and the green islets studding the blue bosom of the lake, and the embowering woods wearing the fresh verdure of early summer, formed a lovely picture. Presently the Earl's Refuge, as the principal islet of Earlsmere was called, lying about a mile from the boat-house, was reached; and the party proposed to go ashore and arrange their *dejeûner* in the old ruin close to the landing-place, which generally went by the name of the Earl's Folly. But to their great disappointment another party, consisting of townspeople apparently from Westonbury, were already in possession of the premises; and though this was irregular, as well as unusual, the Earl's Refuge being the property of the school trustees, who never

allowed any but the boys to go there—still, to have gone on shore and insisted on the intruders vacating the islet, would have been more bother than the thing was worth.

"Other fellows will be sure to find out what has been done, and to make a row about it," said Cobbe. "I vote we go on to some other of the islets. There are plenty of them, and we 've loads of time."

"Hear, hear!" said Burnet; "let us go on through the 'strait' into Lyndmere. I 've never been into Lyndmere but once; and Jack and Corny and myself won't very likely have such a chance as this for a year or two to come."

Charlie consented willingly enough, and rather proud of his privilege as one of Sydenham's crew. They rowed on accordingly through the upper end of Earlsmere and the reach between the lakes known as the "strait," until they entered the larger expanse of Lyndmere, which lay beyond. This was more picturesque in many respects than Earlsmere. On the one side appeared the long sloping lawns of Westonbury Park, with the old Gothic castle surmounting them; and on the other were steep and rugged sandstone cliffs, in some places rising to a height of two or three hundred feet, every level spot being clothed with dense forest.

The islets also were different in character from those of Earlsmere. In the latter they were low and flat, and for the most part covered with underwood; but here many of them were masses of stone of the same description as the environing cliffs, and only patched here and there with foliage. In about half an hour they came alongside one of the largest islets of the Mere, generally known as "Rocky Island." In

outline it something resembled St. Michael's Mount. On its south side there was a good view of the deer park and the castle, from a high shelf in the crag, below which lay a series of low flat rocks, reaching from one end of the eyot to the other. These would have been entirely bare of vegetation if art had not here stepped in to supplement nature. Mould had been brought from the mainland, in which shrubs and wild flowers had been planted. Rustic seats had also been constructed, and a summer-house of rock and wood-work interlaced. The whole formed the most perfect spot for a picnic, that imagination could picture.

"Well, this is first class, I must say," observed Cobbe, as the four-oar, doubling the eastern point of the island, came in sight of this Naiad-like retreat. "Why, this is Virgil's picture itself—

> 'Aquæ dulces, vivoque sedilia saxo
> Nympharum domus'—

as Virgil says in the First——"

"Virgil be hanged, Corny! everything he wrote, and the First Æneid in particular," cried Wilkie. "I am tired to death of hearing it quoted. I wish old Marsh had given you "Pickwick" by way of an imposition, and then there would have been some fun in your quotations. But, nevertheless, the island is uncommon jolly, and I don't think we shall find anything jollier. Just look at that turf and those seats. They seem to be asking a fellow to lie down upon them. And what a bathing-place; the water as clear as crystal, ten feet deep, and a beautiful sandy bottom!"

"Yes," said Burnet, "and stone steps to get in and out by. I agree that we may go farther and fare worse. What say you, Charlie, to a bathe first, then dinner, and then a little fishing before we go home?"

"It would be very nice," said Poole, "but I am afraid this is the place Sydenham told us of, don't you remember, Harry?—the 'Nixies' Grot,' he called it. He said Lord Westonbury particularly objected to any one landing and bathing there."

"Yes, I remember," said Harry, "he told us there had been a row about it with some of the townspeople a year or two ago. They were seen undressing by some of the family at the Park."

"Yes," said Wilkie; "I know Lord Westonbury objects, but that's only when the family are at the castle. They are in London now, all except Lord Lyndford, who is abroad. I heard one of the keepers say so outside the coach, as I came back the other day. There will be no objection to our landing now."

"Are you sure of that?" said Poole; "I should like it as much as any one, if it is not against rules. But if it is, I am on honour with Sydenham not to break them."

"You may make yourself quite easy," said Burnet. "I recollect the row with the snobs. They had no business in the Mere at all, and were, besides, very cheeky to the keepers. Lord Westonbury is always very civil to Westonburies. He is an old Westonbury himself, you know."

"Very well," said Poole, "so be it, then. I suppose the landing-place must be on the other side?"

"Yes," said Burnet, "there is a sort of creek there, with a lot of underwood almost hiding it."

They rowed round and landed, and having conveyed their baskets and rods to the summer-house, began to carry out their programme. They had a delicious bathe, and a still more delicious dinner; Corny declaring he could not decide between the rival merits of the venison pasty and the raised pie until he had made two considerable trials of each. The apricots, the grapes, the wedding cake, and the champagne also received such unqualified approval, that after their discussion, there remained nothing but the two pie-dishes and the empty bottles; as it was not thought worth while to carry them home, they were sunk in deep water. Then the rods were jointed, and the fishing began, which was carried on for two hours with very satisfactory success. Their fish-baskets were getting pretty well filled, and they were beginning to think of setting out on their return home, when, all of a moment, an object made its appearance from behind a neighbouring eyot, about a couple of hundred yards off, which filled them with dismay. This was a small slight skiff, rowed by one man, and making straight for the Rocky Island. The boys withdrew into the summer-house, unjointed their rods, and held a hurried consultation.

"It's one of the keepers," said Burnet. "I suppose he must have received some fresh orders from Lord Westonbury. I am afraid this is my fault: I am very sorry."

"Never mind whose fault it is," said Wilkie; "the question is, have we time to get on board our boat and be off before he comes up?"

"No, we haven't," said Cobbe; "if we had seen him a few minutes before, we might have done it, but he would be close up before we had cleared the islet. Look here, I'll tell you what to do. You four run round and drag the boat farther among the bushes—it's almost hidden as it is—and keep out of sight yourselves. As soon as he has gone round to the summer-house, launch the four-oar, and take his boat in tow. When you are ready, give a loud whistle. He'll run round to see who it is; then you come to this side and pick me up. We shall have him at our mercy then, and he'll take five bob, I'll be bound, to hold his tongue."

"And you'll stop here and chaff him, I suppose," said Wilkie, laughing.

"I will do my humble endeavour," said Cobbe, buttoning up his coat and pulling out his spectacles. "Just hand me that card that was in the hamper, you know. That will do."

"By Jove, Corny, you are as good as a play," cried Burnet. "Come along, we must be off, or we shan't be in time."

Slipping out at the back door of the summer-house, they plunged into the shrubbery and disappeared. Presently, the rower—a tall man, about thirty, apparently, in a shooting jacket, breeches, and gaiters—ran his boat up into the creek, and sprang ashore. He was evidently much excited, and had no sooner reached the land than he hurried round to the south side to parley with the trespassers. He was a good deal surprised to find only one person in the Nixies' Grot, and he an individual altogether different in appearance from what he had expected. The platform was in deep shadow from the high western rock immediately above it, so that it

had been impossible to distinguish clearly the persons seated upon it, but he had felt convinced that there were two or three at the least. But here was only one—a slight, grave-looking person in light green spectacles, who was not, as he had fancied, engaged in fishing, but was sitting with a pencil and a card before him, either sketching or taking notes.

The party in question did not speak or rise from his seat, but appeared to be calmly contemplating him. They eyed each other in silence for some minutes, and then the tall man spoke.

"You are aware, I suppose, that you are trespassing? This is Lord Westonbury's private property, and no one is allowed to land here without an order from himself or Mr. Turner. You have not one from either, I imagine."

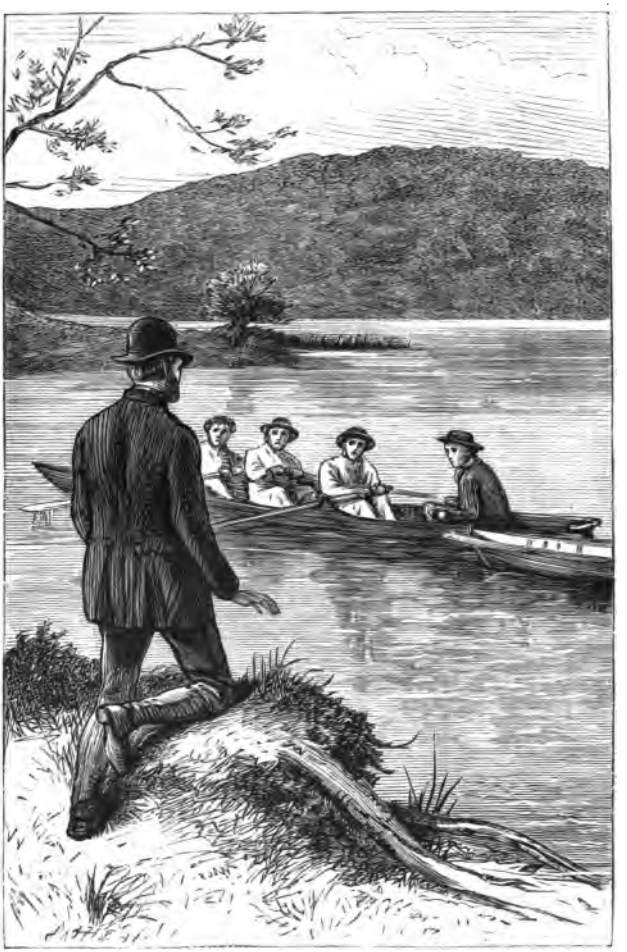
"Unfortunately, no," said the other, in a thin, quavering voice; "but surely there can be no need of orders. A deliciously cool spot like this——"

"You must excuse me," said the stranger, apparently somewhat amused, "but I think you are at least as 'deliciously cool' as the spot. Lord Westonbury, I repeat, does not permit this island to be used. You are a stranger, probably. Will you tell me——"

"A stranger! yes," interrupted he of the green spectacles; "and in what a neighbourhood do I find myself!

> 'Quid genus hoc hominum, quæve hunc tam barbara morem
> Permittit patria? hospitio prohibemur arenæ,
> Bella cient, primâque vetant consistere terrâ,'

as Virgil says in the First Æneid."



"IS THIS YOUR BOAT?"—P. 157

"Will you tell me who you are, sir, and where you come from?" exclaimed the keeper, evidently more and more puzzled at the replies he received.

The intruder rose from his seat, and, with a civil bow, presented the card on the back of which he had been sketching.

The tall man took it, and read, "'J. Mockford, 47, Wigmore Street, Cavendish Square. Dejeûners, suppers, wedding breakfasts of the best quality and at the shortest notice. Fêtes-champêtres and picnics undertaken on the most reasonable terms. Wines of the most approved vintage. Hothouse fruits of all kinds.' Do you mean that this is your name and address?"

The little man bowed.

"'Coram, quem quæritis, adsum,
Troius Æneas,'

as Virgil says in the First Æneid," he answered. "I have the privilege of being one of the junior partners."

At this moment a shrill whistle was heard from the back of the islet, and the tall stranger, evidently suspecting mischief, ran round to the landing-place. But after examining every nook and corner, he could discover no one; and what was more vexatious still, his own boat had disappeared. He was still hunting among the shrubs to try whether he could light upon any traces of the trespassers, when a boat, with four rowers and a steersman, came round the east point of the eyot, with his skiff towing astern.

"Good afternoon," said the steersman, affably; "is this your boat, just behind us here?"

"You had better bring that boat here immediately," said the man in an angrier tone than he had before employed. "It will be the worse for you if you do not."

"Well," said the steersman, "I should myself have said that it would be the worse for you, rather than for us. And yet I do not know. The Nixies' Grot is a delicious place to pass a summer's night in. There is every refreshment and accommodation, and the flowers would make a delightful bed;

'Mollis amaracus illum
Floribus et dulci aspirans complectitur umbrâ,'

as Virgil says in the——"

"What, it was with you that I have been talking in the Grot, was it?" asked the keeper, bursting into a laugh, as it seemed, in spite of himself. "Well, you are an amusing fellow, at all events. Come, if you'll bring that boat ashore and promise not to land here again without leave, I'll not follow this matter any further. I have some suspicion who you are, and am not so easily hoodwinked as you seem to suppose. To quote what seems to be your favourite author:

'Non adeo obtusi gestamus pectora Pœni,'

as Virgil says in the First Æneid. Anyhow, I could easily find out all about you; but I won't try, if you'll promise. Is it a bargain?"

"Yes, sir; and thank you very much," interposed Poole, who had been trying to stop Cobbe. "We didn't mean to trespass, I assure you. We thought Lord Westonbury only

objected to the island being used when the family were at the Park."

"All right, my lad," said the stranger, good-humouredly, as he stepped into his boat and prepared to row off. "Mistakes will happen, but with a little good feeling they may be set right. Good evening, gentlemen! good evening, Mr. Mockford," he added slily; and before Corny could rally himself to reply, his skiff had vanished round the island.

"I say," said Poole, as he watched the departing boat, "that party can't be a keeper. He is a swell of some kind. It can't be old Turner, can it?"

"No," said Burnet, "I should think not. Old Turner's a grey-headed old chap, and lame of one leg. He has a son, though, I have heard, whom he sent to Cambridge. It is not at all unlikely that he is our friend."

"Very likely that's it," said Wilkie. "Well, anyhow, we are well out of the mess; and now we had better get home as fast as we can."

CHAPTER XI.

"CHARLIE," said Oliver, the next morning, as the two boys came out of early school together, "I 'm sorry we landed on that island yesterday. It was very good fun, and I don't think I ever enjoyed anything more till just at the end; but I don't think, somehow, we ought to have done it."

"I 've been thinking the same, Harry. I oughtn't to have let those fellows over-persuade me. I didn't *know* that we had no business to go there, but I suspected it, and I ought to have refused till I had asked Sydenham about it. It was his leave we had, you know, and it was his boat that we went in."

"I suppose it can't be helped now, Charlie."

"It can't be undone, if that 's what you mean; but I think we ought to tell Sydenham about it."

"Won't he think us ungrateful for his kindness, Charlie?"

"Well, I 'm afraid he will, and that will be a great bother; but we oughtn't to mind that, and we can tell him everything that Burnet and Wilkie said, and the mistake they made."

"Won't he pitch into them?" asked Harry, anxiously.

"No, that he won't," replied Poole. "I shouldn't tell him, of course, if I thought there was the least chance of it. No, he may be angry with us, but that will be the worst."

"And that will be bad enough," said Harry, "he's such a good fellow."

"So it will, but it can't be helped; there's no other way out of it. So here goes."

He tapped at the door of Sydenham's study, and receiving the usual permission to enter, went in. Sydenham had just finished reading a letter he had received by that morning's post, which, as Charlie noticed, bore the Indian postmark. He was looking particularly pleased.

"Well, Poole, what is it?" he said, as he noticed the look on Charlie's face.

"I want to tell you, Sydenham, that I am afraid we did wrong yesterday. You gave us leave, you know, to take your four-oar out when you didn't want it yourself?"

"All right, go on."

"And we also had leave to row in the 'strait' and about Lyndmere?"

"Yes, provided you did no harm to anything, and didn't land on the grounds."

"On the grounds—that's it. We meant to have had our lunch and bathe at the Earl's Refuge, but there were a lot of snobs there, and so we rowed on into Lyndmere; and then some of the party proposed to land on one of the islands there, and bathe and——"

"Which of them?" asked the monitor, quickly.

"It's called the 'Rocky Island,' they say," said Charlie, hesitatingly.

"You ought not to have landed there, certainly. Lord Westonbury makes it a special stipulation that none of the

fellows shall go there, and particularly that they shan't bathe there. The Nixies' Grot may be seen quite plain from the drawing-room windows. I wonder you didn't know that."

"Well, I knew that the family didn't like it; but the others said it was only when any one was at the Park that it was objected to, and that the castle was empty now. I know I was wrong, and I am very sorry."

"Yes, you were wrong, Charlie, and I 'm vexed about it. Lord Westonbury said nothing about the family being or not being at the castle. The boys never can tell whether they are there or not, and if any one had seen you——"

"I was just going to tell you that some one did see us, and came off in a boat to the island," and Poole proceeded to relate the particulars of the previous day's adventure.

Sydenham listened, amused in spite of himself. "Well, Charlie," he said, "I am sorry this has happened. I can't think who the man you describe could have been. You are right about the family being away. They are all in London except Lord Lyndford, who is in Italy. Mr. Horne was mentioning at dinner yesterday that he had heard from Lord Westonbury that morning, and he was in great trouble about his uncle's, Colonel Treville's, illness. I suppose this person must have been a cousin, or some relative of the family, who had come down for a few days' fishing. Well, you must be careful in future. Always keep on the safe side, and don't let yourself be talked over; but you have done quite right to come and tell me about it. I wish the juniors always would tell a monitor when they 've got into a mess."

"They 're afraid," said Poole—"afraid of being licked."

"They oughtn't to be. The monitors would hardly ever be obliged to lick fellows for breaking the rules if they told the truth at once; or if they were, two or three cuts would be enough. It's the lying, and the shuffling, and doing worse things to escape detection, that, in most instances, obliges us to thrash fellows severely. Now you must be off for here is Collett come to read the 'Acharnæ' with me."

Charlie left the study, more impressed than ever with his patron's perfections, and Sydenham and Collett sat down to their Aristophanes.

"That's a nice fellow, Sydenham," said the latter, as he opened his book, "and he is doing very well now; but I am afraid, if you leave at the end of the half, he won't find Westonbury so pleasant."

"Why not?" asked Sydenham.

"Well, there are two or three fellows that bear him no good-will. There's that fellow Parsons, who is high up now in the Upper Fifth, he has always spited him for some quarrel they had when Poole first came. I am half afraid Parsons will be a monitor, now that Barton and Durand are going to leave, as it seems they are. It is just a question of his being senior of the Upper Fifth or junior of the Sixth. Poole, and young Oliver too, are likely to have a hard time of it, unless you are here to protect them. Empson will be head of Marsh's, and Parsons, for some incomprehensible reason or other, seems to order him about as he pleases."

"I am sorry for that," said Sydenham, "we must talk to Armstrong about it. He's senior to Parsons, isn't he?"

"Yes, luckily. Parsons took up next to him in the

examination, but no higher. Armstrong is safe to be a monitor, and will do all he can; but he will be only one to two. Of course I want you to get this scholarship, Arthur; but it will be a bad job for the school you're leaving. Holloway means well, but he'll make but a poor head monitor."

"I am afraid so," assented Sydenham. "Well, George, it can't be helped. If some of the monitors choose to abuse their power, and the others are too weak to check them, how is it to be helped?"

"Oughtn't some means to be devised of helping it?" asked Collett.

"What would you have?" returned Sydenham. "As it is, there's the 'five' to whom a fellow may appeal against any monitor, and there is the head monitor, who can in certain cases reverse what they do. Where would be the good of creating more of these checks? It would all come to the same thing in the end. *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*"

"I suppose that must be so," said Collett, "yet it seems odd too. However, we mustn't talk any more now, or we shan't finish this chorus before school."

It was now within two or three weeks of the end of the summer half-year, that most delightful of all periods in a schoolboy's life. There was a succession of exciting incidents. There was the annual match with the Halminster eleven, whose turn it was this year to come to Westonbury. All kinds of rumours had reached the boys of the formidable team that they would have to encounter—two new bowlers, one of them having played in a match with the Marylebone, and knocked their wickets over right and left, and a crack

bat, who had made such a long score off some of the swell bowlers at Lord's that he had been chaired round the ground. When the day came, the confidence of the boys in Stone's and Benham's bowling, and Sydenham's wicket-keeping, and Sydenham's, and Greaves's, and Daly's batting, began to evaporate, like Bob Acres' courage, "at the tips of their fingers;" but the result was glorious beyond all hope. In the first innings, Stephenson, the dreaded batsman, succumbed to one of Benham's twisters in his second over, and he was run out after scoring only seven in the second. Stone's bowling proved even more successful, very few of the Halminster players scoring double numbers. Langton's bowling, to be sure, did rattle down the Westonbury wickets rather fast at first, but Sydenham made a gallant stand, scoring up thirty-seven runs; and in the second innings that dear old Dumbie Dykes went in first, and there he stuck until the match was won, with six wickets to go down. He didn't make more than a dozen runs, but get him out they couldn't. Langton bowled at him till he was quite exhausted, and another fellow had to be put on whose balls Greaves swiped right and left, and off whom Daly made twenty-three. The Halminsters took their departure on the following day, having been hospitably entertained, and having made all sorts of civil speeches; but, nevertheless, with the air of men who had gone out for wool, and come home shorn.

Then there came the scholarship, which was always tried for in the last week of the summer half, and the result announced the day before going home. It was known that it lay this year between Sydenham and Meyler, the latter a

very unpopular monitor, and the former the idol of the juniors' hearts. If good wishes had counted for anything in the matter, it would have been decided the first day in Sydenham's favour; but it was universally feared that Meyler would prove the winner. He was much cleverer than Sydenham, though not nearly so industrious. In the school work generally, Sydenham had the best of it; but when it came to Latin and Greek composition, Meyler's superiority was indisputable. The examiner, an old Westonbury who had run a brilliant career at Cambridge, where he was particularly famous for his Greek epigrams and odes, was pretty sure to prefer Meyler's showy accomplishments to Sydenham's more solid knowledge. The boys were much troubled at the aspect of things on the day before the commencement of the examination.

"I should like to lock that Meyler up in his room to-morrow," said Oliver to his three companions, as he sat in the stern of a two-oared boat, with Cobbe steering, and Charlie and Wilkie handling the oars. "I heard Armstrong and Greenwell talking over the examination just before we started, and they say he is almost certain to get the scholarship."

"I should like to lock him up in a good strong gaol," said Cobbe, "and keep him there until he's too old to come back to Westonbury, as they say he will if he fails. I declare I think he is worse than Hyde, or Garland, or Empson, or even Parsons himself. He doesn't take the trouble to bully fellows as they do; but he stands by and enjoys seeing it done, as a fellow enjoys a play."

"Suppose we 'tice him on board our boat, and leave him on Rocky Island, as our friend Corny here left the keeper," suggested Poole, laughing.

"Or write him an anonymous letter," suggested Wilkie, "requiring him to go up straight to London."

"He'd be too sharp for that," said Cobbe. "If you wanted to prevent his appearance in the examination-room, you must do as we did at the first school I was at. There was a fellow there who was an awful snob and bully, and very conceited into the bargain. He was very fond of spouting, and I believe spouted really well. He was greatly set up at the notion of reciting Hamlet's speech on the breaking-up day. There was always a large party of people present, and the chief speakers were made a great fuss with, which was just what Talboys liked. He was for ever going on with his speech in our room after we went up to bed, and we got so mad with him at last, what with his conceit, and what with the cuffs and abuse he was always giving us, that we were determined to spoil his fun. Willet, who was next me in the school, was the son of the parish doctor, and we suggested to him that he should get a sleeping-draught from his father, which would be enough to send a fellow to sleep for the whole day; and then we would contrive somehow to give it to Talboys on the morning of the speeches. Willet said he durst not ask his father for such a thing; he'd be sure to inquire what he wanted it for. But he remembered that, a year or two before, when he had had a bad tooth-ache, his father had given him a prescription for it, which he thought he could find; and if so he would bring it down

the next morning, and Gordon the chemist would make it up. The following day Willet told us that he had found the prescription all right, and he would take it to Gordon's that afternoon. So he did, and in the evening the medicine was brought, with 'Dose for an adult, only in case of great pain,' labelled on it. 'That's all right,' said Willet, as he read it; 'I remember I was in awful pain when I took it, and it sent me to sleep in a twinkling. How and when are we to give it to Talboys?'

"'Oh, at dinner,' said Lynwood. 'The recitations begin half an hour after dinner, and he's the fourth or fifth to recite, so that he will be just jolly well asleep a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes before his turn comes. We can give it to him in his beer. He generally takes his glass straight off. I'll pour it out, and hand it round.' Well, everything was arranged; the beer was poured out and handed to Talboys. It was a hot day, and he took it off at a draught."

"Didn't he find out that there was something in it?" asked Oliver.

"He did say something about the beer not being very good," was the answer. "But his head was so full of Hamlet that he thought of nothing else. The company came, and those who were to recite went behind the stage, and the speeches began. We watched Talboys narrowly for half an hour or so, but he didn't show the least symptoms of drowsiness. 'It ought to be taking effect by this time,' whispered Willet; 'I am afraid there's something wrong;' and so there was, sure enough, though not what Willet had supposed. It turned out that he had taken a wrong prescrip-

tion; how I never exactly made out. But what he had taken to the chemist's was an order for some croton oil, which Dr. Willet had ordered for an old gentleman who suffered awfully from gout. Talboys appeared on the stage when his name was called all right, and began his speech. He had first a conversation with the King and Queen, and then a wind-up by himself after they were gone. Just about the commencement he began to feel very queer—a swimming in the head, he told us afterwards, and a griping pain which he never felt the like of before. The people thought it was all his good acting, and applauded him no end. I remember his saying:

"'I have that within which passes show,'

and then he certainly looked as if he had. He held on, however, somehow or other, until he got to

"'Oh that this too, too solid flesh would melt!'

and then he couldn't stand it any longer. He rushed into the room behind the stage, used as the green-room, and there he lay down groaning, and crying out that he was dying."

"Weren't you found out?" asked Wilkie.

"No, we weren't," said Cobbe. "The matron sent for the school doctor, but, by good luck, he was out. The head master hadn't suspected that Talboys was ill, and only supposed him to have been nervous; so he didn't make any inquiries till the recitations were over. By that time, and long before Dr. Smithers came, Talboys was pretty nearly right again. All sorts of questions were asked as to what

Talboys had eaten or drunk, but nothing at all could be found out about it."

"How did you come to know what the medicine really was?" asked Oliver. "Did you go to the chemist about it?"

"Well, we thought that would be too great a risk to run; it might have set him asking questions. No. Willet waited till about the middle of the holidays, and then one day showed his father the prescription, and asked him what it was. He told us when he came back."

"I shouldn't like to try that kind of thing on," said Poole.

"No, nor I," returned Cobbe. "None of us were in the green-room, or heard poor old Talboys bellowing, or we must have told the whole thing. I couldn't give croton oil even to Meyler—no, not if he gets the scholarship away from Sydenham."

The gloomy anticipation continued to prevail through the school during the days of the examination; but here, too, an agreeable surprise awaited the boys. There was no Greek verse set, and only one Latin verse paper, in which Sydenham was unusually successful. The prize was, without hesitation, awarded to him, Meyler running only third to Collett's second.

The general joy was somewhat damped by the announcement that Meyler would now remain another year in the school, and consequently he, and not Holloway, would be head monitor next half.

"That will be an awful nuisance," observed Wilkie. "Holloway isn't much of a fellow, but all there is of him is good. If there was any row with Hyde or Garland, he'd do his best to put bullying down."

"You had better say a row with Parsons," said Poole. "He will be the worst bully in the Sixth next half."

"I hope he won't be in the Sixth at all," rejoined Wilkie. "I know it was expected that he would be a monitor when Stone gave out that he was going to leave, but Meyler's unexpectedly staying will make him senior of the Upper Fifth again, instead of junior of the Sixth."

"Aye, that's true," said Poole; "but that was before it was known that Royds——"

"Royds! You don't mean that he is going to leave?" exclaimed Cobbe, who had hitherto sat lounging in his chair, and listening to the conversation.

"I am very much afraid he is, I'm sorry to say," returned Charlie. "I heard him telling Greaves and M'Calmont so only this morning. He believes his father has got some appointment for him abroad, and if so, he is to go immediately."

"Then Parsons will certainly be a monitor," observed Cobbe, "and we shall, all of us, most likely remain in the Upper Fourth next half. Holbeach seldoms puts more than six or seven up into the Fifth at this time of the year, and the highest amongst us—that's you, I believe, Poole—is only ninth."

"I am only ninth, certainly," said Poole, "and Harry, I think, is eleventh."

"Tenth or eleventh, I am not sure which," remarked Harry. "No, neither of us are likely to be shovelled into the Lower Fifth next August. It's only our first half, you know."

"And it will be my *last* half," rejoined Cobbe; "there 's the difference, you see."

"Your *last* half, Corny—what do you mean?" asked Wilkie.

"Very much what I say," replied Cobbe. "I don't think the prospect for the next half is so encouraging as to induce me to go in for it. If you two are not likely to be put up in the Lower Fifth, still less am I. I am two below Oliver in marks, I believe—certainly below him. Well, to be still a junior, with Empson head of the house, Parsons one of the monitors, and Meyler head of the school, is not a pleasant programme. I 'd rather be somewhere else."

"You mean you will manage to get taken away, I suppose?" said Oliver.

"'Sic placitum,' that is my meaning," rejoined Cobbe. "My good aunt will make no bones about the matter; she thinks public schools awfully wicked places as it is. Uncle Armstrong could hardly get her to send me here, and she often groans over what I tell her, most dolefully. A few details as to Garland's, and Empson's, and Parsons's goings on at the 'Silver Eel' will soon clench the business. I shall learn before long whether Royds is going to leave or not, as he lives somewhere near us; and if that be so, good bye to Westonbury."

"Oh, don't leave, Corny," said Poole. "I wouldn't let a brute like that Parsons have any influence over my movements, nor yet Empson, or Garland, or Meyler; it would be making them of far too much consequence."

"Don't leave, Corny," added Wilkie, "there would be no fun without you."

"You are very good," said Cobbe. "My fear is that there would be no fun, either with me or without me, if Parsons is a monitor; and as for Parsons and Co. being of no consequence, it is of myself, and not of them, I am thinking. It is of consequence to me not to lead the life of a dog next half, don't you see?"

"You forget that Armstrong will be a monitor," remarked Oliver.

"Armstrong! Dick Armstrong?" repeated Cobbe. "Ah, Cousin Dick's a good fellow, no doubt, and will do his possible to keep things pleasant; but with Empson, and Parsons, and Meyler all against him, he won't be able to manage it. No, I shan't trust to that. My amiable aunt, I know, is anxious to send me to a parson who lives about thirty miles south of this, and who takes six pupils. I went with her to stay there once, and scraped acquaintance with some of the fellows. They told me it was a jolly enough life, good prog, and plenty of fun. I think it highly probable that August will find me numbered among the Rev. Josiah Burt's 'young friends,' as he calls them."

"And a very pleasant 'young friend' he will find you, I expect," said Wilkie, laughing. "There will be no want of fun while you are there, at all events; but I hope you'll think better of it."

"Yes," said Poole, "the room wouldn't be itself without you—would it, Harry?"

"No," said Oliver. "Corny ought to stay. Things will be bad enough as it is, but Corny's going would make them ever so much worse."

"I am very much obliged, I am sure," said Corny, taking out his pocket-handkerchief, "and be assured that I am not ungrateful. Wherever I may be," he continued, flourishing the handkerchief, and occasionally applying it to his eyes, "I shall bear Marsh's house, and No. 14, in remembrance—

> 'In freta dum fluvii current, dum montibus umbræ
> Lustrabunt——'"

"Oh, oh!" groaned his hearers, drowning the rest of the quotation.

"I declare, Corny," broke out Wilkie, "if anything could reconcile us to your departure, it would be hearing no more of that beastly First Æneid. Gay's 'Fables' were not half as bad. I expect the Rev. Josiah Burt will very soon put a stopper on it, or anyhow, the other pupils."

"You are mistaken," said Cobbe. "Mr. Burt has classical proclivities, as the Yankees say, and will appreciate what your barbarous tastes alone cause you to undervalue. But, I say, have we settled all about going home to-morrow? We are all of us going northwards by the 'Highflyer'—are we not?"

"Harry and I go by it to Binford," said Poole, "and Jack Wilkie here is coming with us to pass a week at Barstone. And you, I suppose, travel as far as Stoverton by it. So we shall all four journey together—a largeish party from one house."

"The party from this house will be larger than you think for," observed Burnet. "Parsons and Gabbett have taken their places by the 'Highflyer' too."

"You don't mean that!" exclaimed Poole, in a tone of

great annoyance. "Why, I thought—I am sure I heard—that Parsons was going home with Gabbett, who lives near London. If I had thought they were meaning to travel by the 'Highflyer'——"

"It was intended that Parsons should go to Mr. Gabbett's,' said Burnet; "but there's scarlet fever or something in the house, and so Gabbett is to go with Parsons, instead of Parsons with Gabbett. I fancy it was only settled yesterday."

"Well, then, I declare I won't go by the 'Highflyer,'" said Poole. "One has enough of the brute's company in the half-year, without having it during the holidays. Don't you think so, Harry? Hadn't we better wait and go by the 'Eclipse,' which leaves at twelve?"

"That doesn't reach Barstone till ten," said Harry. "Won't that be too late?"

"No, we can send a note by Tom Brindley, asking Daniel to wait. At this time of the year it is quite light at ten."

"Won't it be rather flat work hanging about Westonbury all the morning?" suggested Cobbe.

"Not a bit!" said Wilkie. "There is the Borough Fair to-morrow in the Corporation Meadow, and lots of things to see. I half thought of proposing to stop on purpose for it."

"The Borough Fair—is that to-morrow?" asked Cobbe. "Oh, that will do first-rate. I've no sort of objection to stay for that. Well, I was going to breakfast with my Cousin Rolles, but I'll join you at the 'Lyndford Arms' instead; and after that we'll go to the fair together."

CHAPTER XII.

THE breaking-up morning at the end of the summer half was a stirring scene, which few who had witnessed it failed ever afterwards to remember. The boys' boxes had all been packed, and their journey money given out overnight, so that nothing interposed between them and the commencement of their homeward journey but their morning toilet, and that was accomplished with a speed which must be seen to be believed in. The sun shone bright overhead. How could he possibly help shining? In front of the college gate were drawn up the London coaches engaged for the occasion, as well as post-chaises, gigs, dog-carts, and other vehicles innumerable, the horses decked with rosettes of purple and gold, which were the Westonbury colours; the drivers with larger bows of the same in their hats and at their buttonholes. The porters and college servants vied with one another in transferring the chaotic piles of boxes and bags to their proper destinations, realizing an almost fabulous harvest of tips. The air rang with a Babel of joyous voices, exchanging hearty farewells or the rough *badinage* wherein boys delight, and there were the cheery notes of the guards' horns, and the stamping and snorting of the horses, which shared to the full the general excitement. Who, I ask, that has beheld, can ever forget, that bright scene—the only one perhaps throughout a life-

time which had no intermingling shadows? Charlie and his friend made their way through the turmoil and hastened to the "Lyndford Arms," whither their luggage had already been conveyed. Briefly informing the porter that they meant to travel by the "Eclipse," instead of the "Highflyer," they hurried into the coffee-room to make their breakfast, before the arrival of Parsons and Gabbett, whose company they very decidedly eschewed.

By eight o'clock not only was the "Highflyer" gone, but the town was almost entirely emptied of their schoolfellows. Had they returned for a minute to the college gate, round which they had left a surging multitude, busy and clamorous as rooks on a spring morning, they would have beheld nothing but dirt, straw, and solitude. But they turned in a different direction. First handing to Corny as much money as they could afford to spend at the fair, and prudently locking up the remainder in one of their boxes at the inn, they passed down the High Street, and over the ancient Gothic bridge, until they came upon the Corporation Meadow.

A goodly spectacle then presented itself to the eyes of the boys. A double line of canvas booths, stretched straight in front of them, occupied chiefly by dealers in cakes and gingerbread and toffee, oranges, cherries, early strawberries, lemonade, and ginger-beer; or by pedlars in hardware displaying an abundance of knives, whistles, whips, bats and balls, fishing-rods, rackets, hockey-sticks, walking-sticks, cigar-cases, marbles, and all other things which are the delight of a schoolboy's eyes; or by small traders in the exciting literature of ghost stories and sanguinary romances,

the exploits of Three-fingered Jack, or the adventures of the desperate Pirate Captain Avery. Farther on were endless caravans, each adorned on the outside with brilliantly-executed pictures, illustrating the marvels exhibited within—sheep with two heads, and cows with six legs; a man of such enormous obesity that six men were depicted as standing inside his waistcoat; a giant of Goliath's stature, with a dwarf not reaching to his knee; a caravan of wild beasts, the ferocity of the animals within being exemplified by paintings of lions springing upon helpless Hottentots, tigers tearing their victims limb from limb, and boa-constrictors crushing huge buffaloes to death, in spite of their furious struggles; or, again, travelling theatres, with the principal characters in gorgeous costumes occupying the platform in front of the entrance, assuring the passers-by of the profound interest of the performances, which were upon the point of commencing; or, once more, merry-go-rounds, the riders mounted on wild horses and wolves and dragons, tilting with their spears at the ring; or, most enticing of all, the Russian ice-hills in full career, the carriages rushing up and down the sides of the inclines to the manifest delight of their occupants—one ought to be fourteen, and never to have seen a fair at all, rightly to appreciate these things. The boys passed the first half-hour in a bewilderment of delight, hurrying on from one attraction to another, and unable to make up their minds on what they would first bestow their attention. At last they paused before a huge wooden building, the whole front of which was occupied by the picture of an Eastern necromancer, attired in a turban and flowing robes, with a long white beard

descending to his waist, and a cabalistic staff in his hand, with a legend underneath informing visitors that the celebrated magician El Hakeem the Wise was about to display for the benefit of the public, at the easy charge of sixpence a head, the marvels which had puzzled the wisest men of the day to account for, and had been witnessed with the deepest interest by nearly all the crowned heads of Europe. A considerable crowd was pouring in at the door, where a young lady, richly attired like an Oriental Queen, with a chamberlain behind her, also in gorgeous apparel, was receiving the money and dispensing tickets.

"I say," said Poole, as they halted in front of this building, "I should like to go and see that chap, I think. I have never seen a conjuror, nor has Harry here. Have you, Jack?"

"I saw one last Christmas," said Wilkie, "but he wasn't got up like this fellow, all in scarlet and gold. I think we couldn't do better. I dare say you 've seen conjurors, Corny?"

"Yes," said Cobbe, with a *blasé* air, "as many as I care to see. But I shall be very happy to accompany you in. I suppose I shall have to disburse the sum of two shillings, shan't I?" and, as he spoke, he drew out the common purse.

"Yes, sixpence apiece," said Wilkie; "I suppose they won't let us in any cheaper because there 's four of us?"

"Not they," said Cobbe, as they stepped up to the counter; "it would be no use asking." As he spoke he drew out half a crown, which he handed to the lady, requesting sixpence change. She gave it him, but in doing so let

it drop, and the man dressed as a chamberlain, whom she had addressed as Arnulpho, pressed forward to pick it up, handing it with a polite bow to Corny. They were then passed over to another official, who ushered them into an inner chamber, containing a platform and several rows of benches, arranged in a semicircular shape, and already more than half occupied.

"I say, you fellows," whispered Cobbe, as they took their places in one of the back rows, "that Arnulpho, the fellow in the gilded jacket, is up to some dodge. He has put my half-crown back in my waistcoat pocket again. I felt him do it, though I didn't choose to say anything at the time. Look here!" He produced the half-crown as he spoke.

"Well, that's a rum trick to play, any way," remarked Wilkie; "but I don't know that you have any cause to complain of it."

"No," said Corny; "but I should like to know what he's up to, nevertheless. He means to play some trick, depend upon it."

"This isn't our half-crown, Corny," said Poole, who had been carefully examining the coin in question. "I am sure of it, for I contributed the only two half-crowns there were in the purse, and this is not at all like either of them. Mine were both quite new, whereas this has been ever so long in use. And, look here, here's a cross marked on it."

"I tell you what he means to do," said Wilkie; "he is going to play the same trick that I saw the fellow do last holidays, and none of us could make out how it was done. He'll borrow a half-crown from somebody, and mark it, and

then throw it into a box or a hat, or perhaps into his own purse, and then he 'll say that by his art he can make it pass into any gentleman's pocket, and he 'll pick you out, Corny, and tell you to look in your waistcoat, and there it will be found. I remember at home it was found in Uncle William's great-coat, and we couldn't make out how he did it. He has picked you out, Corny, because you wear green spectacles." Cobbe had mounted the articles in question, as it was in general his humour to do when amongst strangers.

"You 've hit it, I expect, Jack," said Cobbe. "Well, now, he 'll find two can play at that. Look here: you take the half-crown, Charlie, and go and sit on the other side of the room there, and leave the rest to me. It will be great fun to see his face when you produce the half-crown."

The boys were delighted at the idea, and Poole taking the half-crown, slipped round behind the benches, and took his seat without being noticed.

In a few minutes the room was sufficiently full for El Hakeem to commence his performance. He proceeded to play off the usual tricks, borrowing a lady's pocket-handkerchief, and producing it from the yolk of an egg which he had just boiled; firing a ring out of a pistol, and then finding it at the bottom of a snuff-box; drawing innumerable bouquets, ladies' fans, gloves, etc., from his hat, which he had a minute before exhibited empty, and the like, to the great admiration of the younger portion of his audience. At length he announced that he was now going to exhibit the last and most celebrated achievement of his art, which he assured his spectators had rendered him the most renowned artist of

his day. He would pass a piece of money into the pocket of any gentleman present, even though he were seated at a considerable distance from him. Would any one be good enough to lend him half a crown for the next five minutes? There were several offers from persons seated in the front row. El Hakeem selected one, which he held up for the inspection of all. "I am going to put a mark upon this," he said, "so that you may all know it again." He dipped a brush in some acid, and made a cross mark on the metal, which was easily enough to be distinguished. "Now," he said, "I am going to melt this half-crown down before your eyes, and when that has been done I will produce it whole and uninjured in the pocket of one of the spectators." He placed a small crucible on the table, and lighted a spirit-lamp under it. He then put in the half-crown, as it appeared, and in the course of a minute or two poured out the metal in a molten state into a bowl of water. "There," he said, "there is an end of the half-crown; now I must bring it back again." He took his wand and waved it over his head. "Abracadabra, tyryo, tyryo, shoon, hey, presto, begone! the half-crown has passed into the pocket of the gentleman in spectacles there, on the last bench but two from the door."

All eyes were turned upon Corny, who got upon his legs with great composure, putting his hand, as he did so, into his waistcoat-pocket, and drawing forth a half-crown. "Here it is, sure enough," he said. "Well, this is a wonderful conjuration. I should like to try it myself." He waved his umbrella over his head as he spoke. "Abracadabra, Tibby's, oh Tibby's old shoes! Hey, presto, begone! The half-

crown has passed into the pocket of the gentleman in the white waistcoat and trousers at the end of the bench there!"

The spectators stared in amazement at this unexpected speech, and El Hakeem himself was so completely taken aback as to be, for the moment, unable to utter a word. Charlie Poole rose with all the gravity he could command, and thrusting his hand into his waistcoat-pocket, exhibited the mysterious coin.

"Here it is, I declare!" he exclaimed, "mark and all. Why, we have two conjurors in the room, it seems, not one." He stepped composedly up to the platform as he spoke, and handed the half-crown to the conjuror, who had by this time recovered his self-possession sufficiently to take the cue thus offered him. He made a short speech, stating that it gave him satisfaction to have proof of the skill of one of his brethren in the magic art, and he would be glad to have a visit from him; after which he dismissed the company.

The four boys left the booth along with the others, highly diverted at the success of their manœuvre. Outside, however, they found themselves the centre of a wondering crowd, who were disposed to pay them more attention than was agreeable to them. They made their escape as quickly as they could, mingling with a large crowd which was just issuing forth at the close of a theatrical performance. Having contrived to get rid of their admirers, and finding that they had still more than half an hour to spare, they betook themselves to one of the booths, where they had some purchases to make of knives, fishing tackle, and the like. While they

were thus engaged, a well-dressed, quiet-looking man stepped up to them, and lifting his hat, addressed Charlie Poole.

"Sir," he said, "I beg to offer you my best thanks for your kind and gentlemanly behaviour in the exhibition-room just now. I do not wonder that you look surprised. My name is Ralph Lucas, but I am known to the public as 'El Hakeem.' I take it for granted that you felt the half-crown put into your pocket by Arnulpho, my assistant at the door, who is not often so clumsy."

"It was into my pocket that it was put," said Corny, smiling, "but I don't think it was his fault. I put my hand into my waistcoat quite by accident, or I should not have found it out."

"Anyway I have to thank you, sir, and this gentleman," he added, turning again to Poole, "for the very gentlemanly, as well as clever, use you made of your discovery. If ever it should be in my power to render you any service in requital of your civility, it will give me much pleasure to do so." He again bowed, and withdrew.

"That fellow's a brick," remarked Wilkie. "I should like to have offered him a glass of something, only I suppose he would have been affronted."

"That wouldn't have done at all," said Poole. "He was too much of a gentleman for that. But, I say, it's getting on now towards half-past eleven. We had better be moving up to the High Street."

They left the Corporation Meadow accordingly, and soon afterwards mounted the top of the "Eclipse," and were on their way northwards. The excitement of the morning had

in some measure taken the edge off their enjoyment, and had it not been for the pleasurable anticipation of seeing Lieutenant Oliver, and Mr. Locke, and Herbie, and all the old well-remembered scenes, they would have felt as near melancholy as it is possible for schoolboys to be. Even Cobbe's reference to the famous scrimmage with Parsons in front of the inn at Gorchester, awoke no more than a few merry laughs, which were soon hushed again. At Oldborough they declined to partake of the coach dinner, having laid in so good a store of provision at the fair in the morning, that they preferred waiting for the supper at Stoverton; but when Stoverton was reached, they felt but little able to enjoy the fare, keen as their appetite had now become. They had here to take leave of Corny Cobbe, whose gig was standing at the inn door when the "Eclipse" drew up, ready to convey him to his aunt's residence some two miles off. If Corny really should be going to leave, and he seemed quite serious about it, how it would spoil the fun of their lives at Westonbury! The tears stood in Charlie's and Harry's eyes as they shook hands with him; and even Cobbe himself, albeit not much used to the melting mood, spoke in somewhat of a husky voice as he bade them good bye. For a good hour or more afterwards not a word was exchanged between the boys. But at length the milestones, still clearly distinguishable in the bright starlight, began to indicate their near approach to Binford; the spire of the principal church was seen standing out against the clear evening sky, and the magic of home began to exert its influence. They drove up to the door of the "King's Arms," greeting with a hearty shout old Daniel,

who was standing under the archway, with his hands in his pockets, returning their salutations with more reserve than usual—a phenomenon which might be accounted for either by the fact of his unexpected detention at Binford for five hours, or by the liberal draughts of ale wherewith he had endeavoured to while away the time, or, as is more probable, by a combination of the two.

But the boys were too full of excitement to notice his demeanour. They plied him with innumerable inquiries as to the health of everybody, from Mr. Locke himself down to Bob the pony, and Fury the ratting terrier; from Obadiah Stubbs and his wife, to Rag the jackdaw, which had begun to speak a few words before they went away, and might by this time be able to palaver like anything. Old Daniel's sulks soon disappeared under their joyous questionings, and the drive home was one long burst of merriment, ending at last in the warm greetings of Mr. Oliver, who had sat up till nearly twelve o'clock, half vexed and half perplexed at their non-appearance.

The lieutenant was still more pleased when, a day or two afterwards, letters arrived from Dr. Formby and Mr. Marsh, and last, not least, from Arthur Sydenham, all speaking warmly of the progress and good conduct of both boys. "I have never known two fellows," wrote Sydenham, "who are more likely to do well at Westonbury, than Charlie and Harry. I should have been very sorry for the mistake made about them during the first two months, if they had not done so well without my help as to prove what there was in them. I am sure my father—who, by-the-bye, has written me word

that he is coming home this autumn—will be much pleased with them."

The boys were even more gratified by these encomiums than Mr. Oliver himself—Sydenham being the one person, above all others, whose good opinion they valued. They were glad, too, to hear of the general's return, who, they were sure, would turn out "a regular brick, like Arthur."

"I remember Sydenham's getting a letter from India about a fortnight ago," observed Poole, "and how pleased he looked. I've no doubt that was the letter."

There was, in fact, nothing to prevent the boys having a happy time of it those holidays, and a happy time they had. They found Herbie Locke's companionship none the less pleasant, than it had been before their departure for Westonbury. Indeed, both boys, but particularly Poole, seemed to take to him more than ever. The three, or rather the four, as long as Wilkie remained at Barstone, were inseparable companions in their rowing excursions up the river, or the still longer sails on the bay, accomplished under Obadiah's surveillance; who took good care not to be guilty again of his former indiscretion. Herbie was never tired of asking about the details of their school life, nor they of satisfying his curiosity; and before long he had become so familiar with "No. 14" and the "Fourth Form school," and "Earlsmere," and "Lyndmere," and the "Earl's Refuge," that he could scarcely believe he knew them only by hearsay.

So passed a month of the holidays away, when one morning the post brought two letters, the contents of which caused our two lads a great deal of embarrassment. The first of

these was addressed "Charlie Poole, Esq.," and was given to him just as he was setting out with Oliver and Locke on a fishing excursion to a place about ten miles off, whither they were to proceed in a pony-cart drawn by Bob. He thrust it into his pocket, only glancing at the direction, and observing that there would be plenty of time to read it on their way to Ledmenham, or, at all events, while they were sitting fishing. At the gate of the Parsonage they found the cart, with Bob ready harnessed, and Herbert in a state of unusual excitement, at some information which his father had had that morning. As soon as they were clear of Barstone, he proceeded to inform them what this was.

"I have known about it for some time," he said, "for three months, I should think: ever since the receipt of Sydenham's first letter, in fact; but I was to say nothing about it for fear of a disappointment. My father wrote to ask Dr. Formby and Mr. Marsh to take me this autumn at Westonbury."

"Take you *this* autumn, Herbie? I thought he had no idea of sending you for another year at the least."

"He didn't mean it; but things are different now. Since he has lost you and Harry as pupils, he has been inquiring after some others, and has heard of two or three of Willy and Tom's age, whom he could teach along with them quite well, but not along with me. And my room, too, will be wanted for the pupils, so he wrote to Dr. Formby in May. A letter has come this morning, saying that a vacancy has all of a sudden occurred at Marsh's, and he can give it to me; so I shall have to go back with you in another fortnight. Isn't that jolly, Charlie?"

Poole made no answer. They were just at the bottom of a steep hill, and he got out to walk, leading the pony, while they followed. When they were at the top of the hill, he started some other topic, which lasted till they reached Ledmenham. He then sent Locke with the pony-cart to the inn, while he and Harry walked. As soon as he was out of sight, Charlie took out the letter he had received that morning, and gave it a hurried perusal.

"This is an awful nuisance," he broke out, when he had finished it.

"What, about Herbie's going to Westonbury?" returned Oliver.

"That and Corny's letter here together. I guessed, when I heard of the vacancy at Marsh's, that it must be Corny's, and so sure enough it is. Here's his letter:

"MONK'S SUTTON, *Aug.* 9, 18—.

"MY DEAR CHARLIE,—The matter is settled at last. I am to go to the Rev. Josiah's on the 28th of this month. I thought it would have turned out otherwise; but about a week ago came a letter from Mr. Royds, saying that 'his son's name had been removed from Dr. Formby's list,' which was his way of signifying that he had taken Jack Royds away. Thereupon ensued what the theatrical people call a sensation scene, but what we used to term 'a regular shine.' I declared I could bear the state of things at Westonbury no longer, and insisted upon being removed. The old lady was stiff about it, and I had to tell her one or two stories which made her very cap stand on end with horror. Even then I am not

sure I should have carried my point, but there had been a great row about the cat. Old Becky, her maid, had complained that I had been puffing cigar smoke into the brute's mouth, and wouldn't listen to my explanation that it was only to see whether it would come out at its ears. Becky brought this up just at the right moment. My aunt declared I had been learning horrid wicked habits at school, and must go to Mr. Burt's to be cured of them; so I 'm to go. And now, my beloved Charlie, I counsel you and Harry to do the like. Bears, and foxes, and wolves are very well in a menagerie, but they are not pleasant to live among; and is not Sykes as rough as any bear, Empson as sly as any fox, and as for that brute Parsons, where would you find a wolf to match him?

'Accipite hæc dicta atque animis advertite vestris,'

as Virgil says. "So no more from yours ever,

"CORNELIUS COBBE."

"You see, Harry, what a mess we're in."

"It's a great bore, certainly," said Oliver, "so far as we are concerned."

"So far as we are concerned—so far, at all events, as *I* am concerned, I don't care twopence for Parsons, or Empson, or Sykes either," broke in Poole.

"Exactly," said Oliver, "nor do I; but it is different about Locke. He won't be able to stand it, you think?"

"*I* shan't be able to stand it, I *know*," returned Poole. "If that beast Parsons, or Gabbett, or Sykes either, were to begin bullying Herbie as they have me, I—I 'll be hanged if I know what I should do; but I certainly should not put up

with it. Won't it be better to tell Mr. Locke all we know, and ask him to keep Herbie at home?"

"I don't see how we could do that, Charlie. What has Mr. Locke been hearing about Westonbury from everybody ever since we were there? That it is about the best school going. And what has happened now? Jack Royds, a very ordinary sort of fellow, has left unexpectedly—that's all. Mr. Locke can hardly be expected to believe that would, all of a moment, make a first-class school into so bad a one, that it is not fit to send Herbie to. He couldn't get out of it now, either, without assigning some reason to Formby; and what reason could he give?"

"There's something in that," returned Poole, "and certainly we couldn't say, if we were asked, that we wanted to be taken away; and, of course, it will be said if we can stay there, so can he. What do you advise, then, Harry?"

"I think we must leave things alone for the present, and see how Herbie gets on at Marsh's. He'll be in our room; of course Mr. Locke has taken care of that. We can see that he's not bullied there, anyhow."

"I should think so," said Poole. "I should like to see any one bully him there."

"Well, and he'll probably be in the Third, and there we can get Ryle Minor to help him; and if the worst comes to the worst, we can at any time write to Mr. Locke to advise him to take Herbie away."

"Well, I suppose that is the best we can do," acquiesced Poole. "Better give no hint of this to Herbie himself. Here he comes. Now for our fishing."

CHAPTER XIII.

POOLE and Oliver returned to Westonbury in a frame of mind which was a curious contrast to their high flow of spirits when they travelled the same road in the January previous. Charlie, in particular, was full of gloomy prognostications. The half-year had begun, it might be said, with a bad omen. They had started on the Thursday, the appointed day, in Mr. Locke's tax-cart, as before. The old horse was the steadiest of goers, and Daniel the most careful of drivers. Nevertheless, they had not travelled half the way to Binford when an accident occurred which cut short their journey, and might have had worse results. Trotting along a part of the road, which was fenced on either side by hedge and ditch, old Dobbin was so greatly discomposed by a gun fired within a few yards of him as to rush directly to the opposite side of the highway, and plunge into the ditch, dragging the cart after him. The three boys and the driver were thrown either into the hedge or the field on the other side, the luggage following. The boys escaped with only a few bruises, but Daniel was struck on the head by the corner of a box, and was too much stunned to rise. It was a quarter of an hour before they could bring him to, and when that was accomplished the cart had to be got out of the ditch, the luggage replaced, and the harness readjusted. All this took so much time, that, when they at length reached Binford,

the "Highflyer" had been gone twenty minutes, and they were obliged to betake themselves back to Barstone.

The "Highflyer" did not run to Westonbury again till Saturday, and the consequence was that, when they arrived on the evening of that day, they found that all the arrangements, in which they had hoped to have a voice, were already made. Jack Wilkie, who knew nothing of Herbert Locke's admission to the school, greeted them with news which, as he supposed, would be highly acceptable, and was much surprised at the blank look it occasioned.

"Well, Charlie—well, Harry, what on earth has kept you all this time? The old 'Highflyer' hasn't broken down, has it?"

"No," said Poole, "it was we that broke down, not the 'Highflyer.' We'll tell you all about that presently. But, I say, how about the fellow that is to be in our room in Corny's place?" and he glanced suspiciously, as he spoke, at some brushes and combs which were laid out on the slab where Cobbe's jug and basin had stood.

"Oh, all right, Charlie, we couldn't have done better. They've put old Dumbie Dykes into our room. It will be very jolly having the manager here, and he is the best-tempered fellow——"

"Dumbie Dykes! you don't mean it?" exclaimed Poole and Oliver in the same breath.

"However came Marsh to do that?" added Poole.

"Well, it is easy enough to understand," rejoined Wilkie. "Jem Burnet has brought his brother back with him, and, of course, wanted to have him in the same room. Old

Dumbie made no objection, but he insisted upon it that he shouldn't be put into any room where there were no fellows belonging to his own class; so naturally enough Marsh gave him Cobbe's vacancy."

"It is our own fault," said Poole, "we ought to have made Mr. Locke write to Marsh about it. I reckoned on being here on Thursday before any of the other fellows had come, and so we should have been, if it hadn't been for that upset. I suppose it can't be altered now."

"Why do you want it altered?" asked Wilkie. "Isn't old Dumbie as good a fellow as any going?"

"Oh, yes," returned Poole, "I like old Dumbie as well as you do; but young Herbert Locke has come back with us——"

"What, Herbie?" interrupted Wilkie. "You don't mean it! I saw there was a new fellow of that name on the list, but I never supposed it was he. Why, he had no idea of coming when I was at Barstone."

"No," said Poole, "it was all done of a sudden, worse luck. But if you have seen Herbie's name on the list, you know where he has been put. Is it on this floor?"

"No," answered Jack, "he's chummed with Hutton in No. 6. I remember noticing it particularly."

"Well, that's good, anyway," observed Oliver, "there's no more good-natured fellow going than Daddy Hutton, and he'll be sure to do anything he can for Herbie, for our sakes."

"Yes, I am glad of that, certainly," said Poole; "if Herbie isn't to be with us, I'd as soon he was in old Hutton's

room as anybody's. But stay: No. 6 is next to the head monitor's room, isn't it?"

"Yes, next to Collett's that was," said Wilkie.

"Then Locke will be close to Empson, and probably have to do pretty nearly all the work of his room. I really think I must go to Marsh about it. I dare say the arrangements are not finally settled even now."

"You needn't be uneasy, Charlie; Empson doesn't mean to take Collett's room. I heard him tell Mother Wilson so myself."

"Doesn't he really? Then will Armstrong have it?"

"I suppose so. He has the second choice, and Collett's is by far the best room in the house."

"Well, then, things won't be so bad as I feared. With Armstrong for his master and Hutton for his room-fellow, Herbie will do almost as well as if he had been in our room. Put out the tea-things, Jack, and unpack that hamper. We have brought several things with us, and I 'm getting peckish. I 'll go downstairs and fetch Locke. He is still with Mrs. Marsh."

The four boys sat down presently to tea. Herbert Locke, who was in happy ignorance of all that had been troubling his friend Poole, was much taken with what he had seen and heard. Nothing could be kinder than Mrs. Marsh; and Hutton, who he found was to occupy the same room as himself, seemed a regular right-down good fellow. Poole let him talk on, too wise to give him any hint of possible troubles which might be awaiting him. Presently they were joined by Dyke, who did not add much to the conversation,

but whose good humour was always infectious. They parted when bed-time came after a very pleasant evening, and Poole betook himself to his pillow, resolved to make the best of things without any attempt to alter them.

But next day he was again thrown out by the unexpected information that Parsons, and not Armstrong, was to have Collett's room. He was at first inclined to be incredulous.

"What could make Armstrong refuse the room?" he said. "It is twice as good as Ryle's, which is the only other monitor's room."

"He was jockeyed out of it, I expect," said Burnet, who was his informant. "Empson didn't flatly refuse it. He said he would resign it in Parsons's favour; and when Armstrong said he couldn't do that, he said, 'Very well, then, he 'd take the room, and then he and Parsons could change.'"

"It doesn't much signify in whose name the room goes," said Wilkie. "Parsons would be safe to be its real master. I judge he has come back this half intending to cut a regular dash. He means not only to be lord and master here in Marsh's——"

"Well, there go two words to that bargain," interposed Poole. "He is not going to be lord and master over me, anyway."

"I wouldn't have you make too sure of that," rejoined Wilkie; "but, as I was saying, it isn't only at Marsh's that he means to come out a tip-top swell. He means to be A No. 1 on the water. He has got his governor to pay for a crack new boat, which Lanky Ferris has been engaged all

the holidays in building. I am told she is a regular clipper, and there won't be a boat on the Mere to match her. He reckons, I have no doubt, that, what with his new boat, what with his own sculling, which I must allow is first-rate, he'll carry off the Lyndford cup."

"I am sure I hope he won't," burst in Oliver. "I'd rather Marsh's lost the cup—I'd rather it came in last in the races, than that brute Parsons should be the winner."

"Ah, so you think now, I dare say, Harry," observed Burnet. "But when it comes to the day of the race itself, and you hear all the fellows each backing up the champion of their own house, you'd find yourself shouting for your own man, however much you might dislike him."

"Parsons won't be the champion of this house," said Poole. "Armstrong is at least as good. Give them even boats, he's better to my mind."

"He may be to your mind, Charlie," said Burnet, "but not as a matter of fact. Tom Ferris told me that Parsons could give Armstrong a boat's length start, and yet catch him before he got to the Folly. Besides, they haven't even boats. Parsons's is ever so much the better. Then, again, Parsons has laid himself out to get the Latin medal poem. That's given away, you know, at the end of the half, and is recited at the speeches. There are always a lot of swells at them, and the founder's dinner afterwards. Parsons would like nothing better than to stand up before the company, and spout his verses, and have his health drunk, and return thanks, and all that sort of thing."

"I don't make a doubt of it, Jem," returned Wilkie. "But

surely Meyler, and Holloway, and M'Calmont, and a lot of others, are not going to let him do that."

"I don't know," said Burnet. "Meyler would beat him easy at most things, and so, I suppose, would Holloway too. But Parsons's best point is his Latin verse, and he takes an awful lot of pains with it. Marsh—who doesn't like him, mind you—was always commending him for it last half."

"'There 's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip,'" quoted Wilkie. "It wants near upon six weeks to the skiff race at present, and more than double that time to the verse medals. Wait and see, that 's my advice."

"Very good advice too, Jack," said Poole. "Only I think we shall see how things are likely to go, long before that; so far, at all events, as Parsons is concerned."

The lapse of a few days proved sufficient to verify Charlie's prediction, not only so far as Parsons was concerned, but as far as all were concerned, who now held the reins of authority. The first direct proof of the change that had come over Westonbury, was the removal of Dumbie Dykes from office, and the restoration of Sykes. Parsons had endeavoured to effect this diplomatically; that is to say, he had tried to induce Dyke to resign. But here he failed. Complaints were continually made by himself and his clique of the cricket lists. They were publicly altered by Empson or Garland, and remarks were indulged in, reflecting on the manager. But Dyke heard them all with undisturbed equanimity. The conspirators, perceiving that their arrows had gone wide of the mark, proceeded next to find fault with the juniors that were assigned to them as watchers-out at

cricket; and others were sent for to take their places, who were known to be special friends of the manager. Poole and Oliver were several times ordered down in this manner to scout for Meyler or Garland, notwithstanding that their position at the top of the Fourth Form rendered such a proceeding most unusual. This failing in like manner to stir the bile of the patient Dyke, Parsons and his friends were driven to take more direct measures. Complaints were openly made in the cricket-field of the bad management of things under the present *régime*, until at last Meyler sent for Dyke, and represented to him that there was nothing but dissatisfaction under his management, and that he had better take steps to remove it, or resign his situation. Benjamin received this intimation after his usual fashion, that is to say, in total silence, thereby reducing Meyler to much perplexity.

"Did you hear what I said?" he asked, after five minutes of embarrassed silence.

"Heard," returned Dyke.

"And what do you mean to do?"

"Don't know."

"You don't know? Do you think you can alter things so as to give satisfaction?"

"No."

"Then do you mean to resign?"

"No."

Meyler hesitated. It was a very unusual step to remove a manager; one which required a strong ground to justify it, such as Sydenham had had in the previous half-year. More

over, that act was almost universally acceptable to the boys; and the present step, as Meyler knew quite well, would be in the highest degree unpopular. Parsons, however, was not to be baffled. He whispered a word or two to Empson, and then both of them spoke to Meyler apart; after which Meyler resumed: "I think it would be better for you and for everybody else, that Sykes should resume his office. There was not, so far as I know, any dissatisfaction expressed then; and many think he was unfairly dismissed."

"Turn me out, if you like."

"I know I can, and I mean to do it," rejoined Meyler, fairly beaten by the other's invincible coolness.

"Not manager any more?" asked Dyke.

"No, you're not manager any more. I have spoken to Daly and Benham; they agree in electing Sykes, so that, with Empson's vote, there is a majority of four to one in Sykes's favour. He is manager from to-day."

Dumbie Dykes turned away, to all appearance not in the slightest degree discomposed; but the mass of the school, which had gradually been gathering while the conversation was going on, did not display the same philosophy. A loud and very general groan followed Meyler's last announcement; and one voice was bold enough to add, as on the former occasion, "Three cheers for Dumbie Dykes!"

Meyler looked annoyed as he heard this demonstration, but Parsons brazened it out. He knew that his point was carried. However much the monitors might regret subsequently the step they had taken, it would be impossible for them to rescind it. And, after all, what did it matter

what the juniors thought or said? The power of the Sixth Form was too firmly rooted to be overthrown. He endeavoured to make some capital out of what had taken place.

"What are you making this row about?" he said, turning sharply upon Poole and Oliver, who were among the loudest of the cheerers.

"Cheering old Ben," replied Charlie, defiantly.

"Well, you had better stop that, or you may get something to make you sing a different tune. Those two fellows are the coxiest young vagabonds in the school," he continued, addressing Meyler; "they'll never be quiet till they've had a regular sharp thrashing."

"They're likely to get it pretty soon, I should think," returned Meyler, eyeing our two lads with no favourable glances. "They'll come under Sykes's ministrations, or I'm mistaken."

Very warm discussions took place that evening, at the various boarding-houses, over the events of the day; and the comments of the boys would not have gratified either the head monitor or Sykes, if they could have heard them. In No. 14 more particularly, strongish sentiments were vented, and Poole and Oliver went so far as to suggest open resistance to the power of the monitors. But the idea did not find general favour.

"Do you mean that the monitors are to do just what they like, and we are to submit to it, let it be what it may?" exclaimed Charlie, indignantly. "Why, at that rate, one might as well be a negro slave at once."

"Well, I don't suppose I should let them gouge out one

of my eyes, or score me on the back with a red-hot iron," said Wilkie, "as they say the Yankees do to the niggers; and I don't suppose the monitors are very likely to attempt it. But I know in a general way, that there 's very little change to be got out of them. If it comes to a row, the school is generally on their side, and if the school isn't, the masters are."

"The masters!" repeated Oliver, with flashing eyes; "the masters back up a brute like that Hyde, for instance! He doesn't belong to this house, I 'm glad to think, but one knows quite enough of him without that. I saw him send a junior one day to Ginger's for some short-cake. It was Doyle, I believe, but I 'm not sure. Doyle didn't exactly understand what he meant, and brought him the wrong sort. It was quite an unintentional mistake; but Hyde made him stand up, and gave him three tremendous boxes on the ear, every one of which knocked him right over."

"Yes, that 's nothing very uncommon with him," said Burnet; "if a fellow doesn't come immediately, when he shouts for a junior, he 'll catch up a stick, and lay into him till he can hardly stand. The fellows at West's have told me such things about him that I do wonder, I must say, that a row hasn't been made about them."

"Or that some one hasn't wrested the stick from his hands, and given him twice as good as he brought, as many of the Fifth at West's could do," suggested Oliver; "and do you mean to tell me that if any one had done so, and the matter had been brought before the masters, they 'd have taken Hyde's part?"

"I don't know about taking Hyde's part," said Wilkie; "but they certainly would have pitched into the junior who struck him. Most likely Formby would have expelled him. You see, he'd say that the junior ought to have gone to the head of his house——"

"And that's Meyler," interposed Oliver. "*He's* head of West's. Much good that would have done!"

"Well, that would have been Meyler's fault," persisted Wilkie. "What it comes to is this—if the monitors abuse their power, the juniors can't be allowed to take the law into their own hands. That's what the masters would say, at all events."

"That seems to me very much like handing over the juniors, tied hand and foot, to their mercy," observed Poole. "You can't expect the monitors, as a rule, to interfere with one another; the juniors will never be got to complain to the masters; and it seems they are to be expelled if they right themselves. I must say, Jack, I agree with Harry. I can't believe that a just and kind-hearted fellow like Marsh, or Formby either, from all I've heard of him, would be down so sharp on a junior, who turned upon any monitor who was bullying him."

"You can't, Charlie? Why, did you never hear what happened about eight or nine years ago? There was very much such a row as Harry here recommends. I know all about it, because my brother was here at the time. It happened in his third half, I think; anyhow he saw it all."

"Tell us about it, Jack," said Burnet. "I've heard it, but I am not sure I know all the rights of it."

"Well, it was this," said Wilkie. "It happened one day that a lot of fellows had gone down to see a skiff race, and Sir Gregory Knyvett's hounds came right up to Earlsmere. It is a thing that hardly happens once in ten years, because the nearest meet is a very long way off. The fellows—a great many of them, that is—set off like mad after the hunt, to see the death, as the fox was evidently on his last legs. There was a run of nearly two miles before the fox was killed. The first half-mile or so was within the ordinary school bounds, but the place where the brush was cut off was a good bit beyond even the monitors' bounds.

"Well, when they had all got back to Westonbury, some of the monitors who had not been at the run, began to make a row about the juniors having gone out of bounds without leave. At that time there were several big Fifth Form fellows who gave themselves airs, and it was thought that the monitors wanted to make use of the opportunity of taking them down a bit. They insisted on thrashing those who had followed the fox. The Fifth Form fellows swore the Sixth had no right to thrash them. They said the monitors had themselves been out of bounds, and were therefore as much to blame as themselves; and besides, they went in company with several monitors, and as they hadn't forbidden them to join the run, that was equivalent to leave. But the monitors in question, when appealed to, declared that they hadn't given any leave, and wouldn't have given leave, had they been asked."

"How mean!" broke in Oliver; "why, of course, any one could have understood them to have no objection."

"I must say I think so too," said Wilkie, "but then we hadn't the settlement of the matter. Well, the long and the short is that they called up four big Fifth Form fellows to receive a school thrashing before twelve. Have you ever seen one, either of you?"

"No," said Poole, "there were no school thrashings last half."

"Well, it isn't a nice thing to see. The four biggest monitors were selected to give the thrashings. First of all Forbes, the head monitor, called up Chubbe, and Chubbe submitted. He had forty cuts, and his coat and waistcoat were a mass of rags when it was over. Then a fellow called Carr was called, but he wouldn't have it, nor would Stratton or Summers; and when Forbes and the others tried to oblige them, they turned to, and gave the monitors a tremendous thrashing."

"Serve them right too," cried Poole and Oliver together.

"Very likely it did," remarked Wilkie coolly, "only the masters didn't think so. Formby heard the whole matter from beginning to end, and then decided against Carr and the others. He said, of course, the monitors deserved to be punished for going out of their bounds, and also for not stopping the juniors; but that those offences were not the affair of the juniors. On the other hand, he said the juniors *were* answerable to the monitors for their breach of the rules, and as they had resisted and struck them, he should expel the ringleaders, and flog the others."

"And did he?" asked Oliver.

"Yes, he did. Carr, Stratton, and Summers were all expelled."

"I don't consider there was any disgrace in being expelled under those circumstances," exclaimed Oliver. "I'd never consent to be thrashed in the way you describe by any brute of a monitor that ever lived!"

"Nor I," said Charlie, "unless I was in the wrong."

"Well," said Wilkie, "I shall wait till the time comes, before I come to any resolution about it."

"Right," said Dumbie, oracularly, and the conversation ended.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WEEK and more passed away, and nothing further occurred to make Poole uneasy about Herbert Locke. He himself professed to be quite contented with everything.

"Don't make yourself uncomfortable about me, Charlie," he said; "I assure you there is no reason. I should have liked, of course, to have been in the same room with you and Harry; but that can't be helped, and Hutton is very kind to me. And as I am placed in the Upper Third, and Ives and Dickeson in No. 5 are in the form below, they will do nearly all the work of Parsons's room. Hutton doesn't think I shall have much to do with Parsons. There's no reason why he should trouble himself about me at all."

Poole was somewhat reassured by this speech, which was made one fine warm September day. He proposed that they should take advantage of the weather, by having a bathe in the Perch's Hole. Harry reminded him that Locke could not swim, and therefore must not bathe in the place named.

"I forgot that," said Poole; "but never mind, he can bathe in the Lady's Pool, and we can give him his first lesson. Every one may bathe there."

"So we can," said Oliver; "and besides that, we can jump in ourselves at the Perch's Hole, which is close by That will be jolly enough."

The four boys accordingly set off—Wilkie, Poole, Oliver, and Locke—as soon as they had put away their books, and after half an hour's walk reached the spot designated by Charlie as the Lady's Pool. It was a part of the Mere which probably at no very late date had been dry land—a wide bay, thirty yards or so in width, and rather more than that in length. The depth throughout was nowhere more than three feet and a half, and close into shore not so much. The bottom was hard and sandy; in fact a better bath, in which junior boys might take their lesson in swimming, could not well be found. At the commencement of this bay there was a high rock, and beneath it the water went down to a depth of ten or twelve feet; and here it was the delight of the juniors, after they had surmounted the examination, held once or twice in every season, of their swimming powers, to take their first header. Our young friends having arrived here, prepared first to bestow a lesson upon Herbert, and then to enjoy their own bathe off the point.

Herbert had begun to strip, when the sound of voices in conversation was heard, and almost immediately afterwards Sykes and Gabbett came in sight, on their way, as it afterwards appeared, to the "Silver Eel," where they were to be joined presently by Empson and Parsons.

"Hallo, what now?" exclaimed the manager, as he came in sight of the four friends. "Why ain't you four fellows watching-out at cricket for Meyler, I should like to know?"

"It was only the Lower Fourth that were ordered down," said Poole, "and I am in the Upper Fourth."

"And so am I," said Harry.

"I know you are preciously stuck up about being in the Upper Fourth," returned Sykes; "but you will just understand that any one in either part of the Fourth may be ordered down to cricket. And I 'd like to see them refuse to go. And you are not all in the Upper Fourth. Neither of these fellows is. So you have told me a lie."

"I *am* in the Upper Fourth," said Wilkie; "I was put there yesterday."

"And Locke is a new fellow," added Poole, "and his month is not up yet."

"A new fellow, eh!—bathing for the first time, and you are going to sheep-wash him, are you?"

"No," said Charlie, angrily, and taking no pains to conceal his disgust; "we are going to give him his first lesson in swimming."

"Oh, indeed!" said Sykes. "How very kind of you! He is a great friend of yours, I suppose?"

"Yes, we know him at home," was the answer.

"Know him at home, do you? Well, I don't see that your knowing him at home ought to prevent the regular customs of the school from being observed. It has always been usual to sheep-wash new fellows, hasn't it, Gabbett?" he asked, turning to his companion.

"Yes, of course," returned Gabbett; "there is a regular day appointed for it—used to be, at all events. Every new fellow is sheep-washed."

"I never was," said Poole, "anyhow, nor Oliver either."

"I expect that was because Sydenham got you off," returned Sykes. "He got you off one or two things, you

may remember, young fellow. But he is gone now, and won't meddle any more. Do you understand that?"

"A live jackass is of more value than a dead lion," observed Gabbett.

"I quite see the point of that," observed Poole, with a sarcastic glance at Sykes.

Sykes turned very red, and Charlie was sensible, a moment afterwards, that he was unwise in provoking his antagonist needlessly. Sykes, who had only half meant his threat before, was now seriously resolved to put it in execution. "Come," he said, "no more palaver. Are you two chaps going to sheep-wash the new fellow, or must Gabbett and I do it?"

"I shall have nothing to do with it," said Poole.

"Nor I either," shouted Oliver, "and if you do it, I think it will be a blackguard shame."

Sykes was now thoroughly provoked. He had long borne a grudge against our two heroes, and though he was too lazy to seek out a direct opportunity of indulging it, he was quite ready to do so as soon as one presented itself. "I tell you what," he shouted, "I 'll sheep-wash *you*, clothes and all, and teach you to use your tongue civilly." So saying, he made a rush at Harry, who, catching up his jacket and waistcoat, of which he had just denuded himself, and skimming nimbly round a tree, evaded his pursuer.

"I say," he shouted, casting his words, Parthian-like, behind him, "if you mean to teach people civility, you must first study the subject yourself."

Poole and Wilkie broke out into a loud laugh of approval, which still further provoked their adversary. He made a

second rush at Charlie, who had just resumed his clothes, and was standing only a few feet from him. But Charlie was even nimbler than his companion, and a brief and hot pursuit was terminated by Sykes catching his foot in a root and coming ingloriously to the ground. He sprang up again blind with fury, and made a third charge at the boy nearest him, who this time was Herbert Locke. He had been about half undressed when the two big lads came up, and had remained in the same condition throughout the altercation, half curious, half alarmed.

"Run for it, Herbie," shouted Poole, as he saw Sykes's intention. The boy obeyed, but in his haste did not perceive that he was running straight on to the tongue of land projecting into the lake, where it would be impossible for him to escape his pursuer. He ran up to the very edge of the rock overhanging the water, and there was obliged to stop. Sykes tore after him, still boiling with rage, and catching him up, without a moment's consideration, pitched him straight into the water.

The three boys halted at the several points which they had reached, the mingled mirth and anger which had possessed them a moment before, changed to deadly terror.

"Stop, stop, Sykes," they shouted, "he can't swim, he'll be drowned, there is ten foot of water there!" They reached the edge of the bank just in time to see the ghastly face of the drowning boy, as he sank for the last time into the deep water.

Sykes stood staring stupidly at his work. "I say, can any of you fellows dive?" he said. "I can't, or I'd try to fetch him up."

"No, no," exclaimed Oliver, "I can't, I can't! I can swim, but I can't dive; none of us can."

"I'll run to the 'Eel.' They have got drags there," shouted Poole; "that's the only hope." He set off running without a moment's delay, when he came right against Armstrong and Greenwell, who were taking their afternoon walk along the side of the lake.

"Halloa!" exclaimed the former, stepping backwards, as Charlie came full tilt against him, "what is the matter now, then?"

"There's a fellow in the water!" gasped Poole—"Herbert Locke—he can't swim—Sykes threw him in—none of us can dive—I am going to fetch Sawdon—at the 'Eel,' you know." And he was off again without waiting for Armstrong's reply.

"What, is he in deep water?" exclaimed Armstrong, running up. "Yes, by Jove, that he is! I say, Greenwell, you are a better diver than I am. But we'll both try."

Greenwell was already half stripped, and in another minute both the monitors had plunged in. The other boys watched them anxiously from the bank. They saw Greenwell reach the figure of the boy, who was now lying perfectly motionless at the bottom, and with difficulty lift him. The two rose slowly to the surface. Then Armstrong, coming to help his friend, put his arm under Locke's shoulder, and the two struggled along with him towards the shallower water. Wilkie broke off a long bough from a tree and held it out to Armstrong; the latter caught it, and by its help the swimmers were drawn a few yards forward, until their feet at last touched



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the bottom. Then Wilkie and Oliver, wading out, carried Herbert between them to the shore, both the monitors being too much weakened by their exertions to do anything more than reach the land themselves.

"Thank God for that!" exclaimed Armstrong, as soon as he gained the bank. "I did not think we should get him out."

Greenwell was too much exhausted to speak. He lay down on the grass, while the others employed themselves in endeavouring to restore Locke to consciousness. He had not been in the water long enough to alarm them for his life but he was a delicate lad, and might sustain serious injury from his immersion. He was a long time coming to, and the boys were very glad to see Poole returning, accompanied by the keeper of the public-house, carrying blankets, and brandy, and other restoratives. After the lad's limbs had been rubbed with these, and some stimulants poured down his throat, he again opened his eyes, and in a few minutes was sufficiently recovered to be able to set off homewards, accompanied by Poole and Wilkie.

Sykes had stood all the time looking on, not offering to render help, but apparently in a kind of maze. As soon as he saw the boys set out on their return to Westonbury, he started as though relieved from the influence of some spell, and was on the point of following his friend Gabbett, who had made his exit very early in the affair. But Armstrong, who had now resumed his clothes, called to him to stop.

"Just wait a minute, Sykes. I should like to know how this has happened. How came a fellow that couldn't swim

in the Perch's Hole? And he was only half undressed, too. I have a sort of idea that somebody said he had been thrown in. Did any one say so?"

"Yes," said Oliver, who had remained behind in the hope that Armstrong would take the matter up. "Poole said so; and it is quite true. Sykes here threw him in."

Armstrong looked at Sykes as if for an explanation, but the latter only looked defiant and sulky.

"Did you throw this fellow in, Sykes?" inquired Armstrong.

"Well, yes, I did," he answered, endeavouring to carry it off coolly. "He was impudent, and I didn't know that he couldn't swim."

"He wasn't impudent," exclaimed Oliver, impetuously. "He didn't say a single word to you, I'll take my solemn oath of it. And you *did* know that he couldn't swim. You proposed to sheep-wash him, because you had found out that it was the first time he had ever bathed, and therefore you must have known that he couldn't swim."

"What do you say to that?" asked Armstrong, observing that Sykes did not reply.

"I am not obliged to make any answer to what an impudent young whelp like that may choose to say. They were all cheeking me, and I had a right to lick them."

"I shall try that right, Sykes," said Armstrong. "I know you have been made manager, and that gives you a certain power over the juniors. But it gives you no right to bully a fellow belonging to my house, in this way. And I haven't forgotten, though you appear to have done so, that Syden-

ham dismissed you from your managership, last half, for a piece of bullying not half so bad as this."

"That's the head monitor's business, not yours," said Sykes in an altered tone. Armstrong glanced at him in some surprise, and perceived that Parsons and Empson had come up, and were standing listening to what was going on.

"What is the matter?" asked Parsons, glancing in surprise from one face to another.

"The matter is, Parsons," said Armstrong, "that there has been a most disgusting piece of bullying just now. A junior—a new fellow—who couldn't swim, and was a poor little weakly chap into the bargain, has just been pitched into the Perch's Hole here, and was as near drowned as a fellow could be. Sykes deserves as sound a thrashing as any fellow ever had."

"A monitor can't thrash the manager," said Parsons—"that's a rule that has never been broken, as long as the office has existed."

"Very likely," said Armstrong. "I am not denying that. But he ought to be dismissed from his managership, and then thrashed."

"No one but the head monitor can dismiss a manager," rejoined Parsons. "That is so, isn't it, Empson?"

"That's the rule, so far as I have always heard," said Empson. "But of course the matter can be referred to Meyler. If he thinks proper to turn Sykes out, he can."

"I know that as well as you do, Empson," said Armstrong, as he took Greenwell's arm, and the two walked off together, followed immediately afterwards by Oliver, who was quite

aware that his room would be more welcome than his company.

"Well, Bill, what's all this about?" inquired Parsons, when the other monitors were out of hearing.

"Oh, I don't know," returned that worthy. "Armstrong's always making a jaw, because he has just got into the Sixth, I suppose. He'd like to be the real head of your house, instead of Empson."

"Not unlikely," said Parsons, "but he won't have his way in that matter, I guess—hey, Empson?"

"I should think not," returned Empson, "not if I know it, anyway."

"Not if I know it either," said Parsons. "Well, come along now, you two, or we shall be late at the 'Eel.' We'll see Meyler, when we get home; and if Armstrong does bring this matter up, he won't get much change out of him, I'll answer for it."

"He won't say any more, I expect," said Empson.

Armstrong did say something more, however. On the following morning he made his appeal to Meyler in the presence of the other monitors. He related in very plain terms what he had seen, and urged Meyler to dismiss Sykes. He said it would be a disgrace to the school, and the monitors especially, if they allowed a fellow to retain his office as their representative, who had been guilty of so abominable a piece of bullying; for which any junior ought to have a severe thrashing. His speech produced a considerable impression; and Meyler—who had already been somewhat put out by the manifest unpopularity of Sykes's appointment, for whom he

did not care twopence, and on whose account he was not at all inclined to incur further ill-will—might have been induced to accede to his suggestion. But Parsons hastened to take up the defence. He first of all submitted that, as the dismissal of the manager rested with the head monitor only, Armstrong had no business to bring the matter before the whole of the Sixth Form. He was stopped, however, by Holloway, who told him that Armstrong had not proposed to come to any vote on the subject; but merely brought it before Meyler's notice in the presence of all, that any one might say what he thought about it, which was perfectly regular, and often done.

Finding he could not stop the discussion altogether, Parson's now put in Sykes's defence. He asked Armstrong whether he himself had witnessed the scuffle between Sykes and the other boys, which had ended in Locke's fall into the lake. Armstrong replied that it had all occurred before he came up, but that he had seen the boy in the water, and had heard the stories of both parties.

"Excuse me," said Parsons, "you did not hear Sykes's story. He did not feel himself bound to answer your questions, as though he were accountable to you; and, according to your own showing, he is not. Besides that, he knew quite well that you were prejudiced against him, and would be pretty sure to believe anything that those bumptious young juniors chose to say, in answer to his assertions."

"You have no right to say that, Parsons," said Armstrong. "And it is not true either."

"It 's true anyway that you didn't hear what he had to

say for himself," said Parsons; "and I suppose you don't expect Meyler to decide this, do you, until he has been heard?"

"Of course not," was the general cry.

"Very well," said Parsons. "I have been talking with the manager, and I have heard his version of what happened. He said he was going by quite accidentally, when he saw young Poole and one or two other fellows out of our boarding-house just going to bathe, and a new boy with them, whose name, I believe, is Locke. There has always been a custom in the school—long before I came into it at all events—of chucking new fellows in. I don't say whether it is a good custom or a bad one. I only say that it is one that has existed for a long time at Westonbury."

"Everybody knows that," said Empson. "There is not much to make a fuss about there."

"Perhaps not," said Armstrong, "if they are not thrown into deep water or roughly handled. But——"

"Just let me speak first, if you please," said Parsons. "You can say what you like afterwards. Well, Sykes stopped and began chaffing with these fellows about whether they were going to sheep-wash young Locke. They were very impudent to him, particularly Poole. I can answer for it myself, that there is not a more impudent young chap in the whole school, than Poole. I think you will bear witness to that," he added, turning to Empson and Garland, who both assented.

"Well, Sykes ran up, meaning to give these fellows one or two for their sauce. They dodged out of his way, con-

tinuing to chaff him—this young Locke, or whatever his name is, along with them. Sykes ran after him, and came up with him just as he reached that bit of rock that hangs over the Perch's Hole. They were both running as hard as they could pelt, and neither could stop themselves. Sykes was as near over himself as possible, and the other one went clean into the water. Sykes would have got him out if he could; but not being able to dive, it was out of his power. Now I should just like to know what there is to make such a fuss about here?"

"I don't think there is anything, for my part," said Hyde, a large coarse-looking lad, to whom reference has already been made, as notorious for his harshness towards the juniors. "There seems to me to have been a set made against the manager for some time past, which ought to be stopped. Independently of his office, it isn't to be supposed, that a fellow of his size and strength will stand being cheeked by a lot of juniors, whom he could thrash with one hand."

"Of course not," said Garland. "I don't know whether Armstrong has anything more to say; but I think we needn't have been bothered with this at all."

"I have a good deal more to say," cried Armstrong, who was nettled at these remarks. "Since you 've heard Sykes's story, you ought to hear Poole's——"

"We can't be examining fellows all day," said Empson.

"Certainly not," assented Meyler. "I don't see, I must say, why the manager's story should not be received. If we were to plague ourselves, or if I were to plague myself, with every complaint the juniors make against the manager, there

would be nothing else done; and besides, no manager would consent to act. I think the whole thing had better be dropped."

"Quite right too," said Empson.

"Hear, hear!" said Parsons, and several others.

Armstrong saw it was useless to persist, and left the study accompanied by Greenwell. He was a good deal disgusted and indignant; but he felt it was no use making any further fuss. The disappointment and wrath in No. 14, however, were not so easily allayed. It was debated between Charlie and Harry for a long time, whether they should not write immediately to Mr. Locke, tell him all that had happened, and advise him instantly to take Herbert away. Perhaps they would have done it, if Herbert himself had not again begged them to take no step of the kind. "He had been sent to Westonbury," he said, "and there he meant to stay. He did not suppose that any very great harm would be done to him. But at all events he was quite prepared to put up with it, whatever it might be." The others could not but commend his pluck, though their indignation was increased rather than diminished by Herbert's patience. Any one who watched the demeanour of the boys closely could have had very little doubt, that before long there would be a far more serious row than any that had yet broken out.

"Your month is up to-morrow, isn't it, Locke?" asked Hutton one evening to his room-fellow.

"Yes," said Herbert, "to-morrow."

"I thought so," said Hutton, "that 's what Gabbett wanted this afternoon then. He was here asking for you; means to

give you some work to do for Parsons, I suppose. I dislike that fellow Gabbett, more than any one in the house. He's Parsons's jackal, and would stick at nothing Parsons set him to do."

"Well, never mind," said Locke. "I dare say he won't give me anything very hard to do; and anyway I can do my best, and no one can do more."

CHAPTER XV.

LOCKE soon discovered that Gabbett's visit to his room was not without its meaning. On the following morning, as he was returning from school, he was pounced upon by the boy before named, and conveyed to Parsons's room.

"Your name is Locke, isn't it?" inqu red the monitor, "and your month is up?"

"Yes," replied Herbert.

"What part of England do you come from?"

"From Barstone, in E——shire."

"Barstone," pursued Parsons. "There are some other fellows in the house that come from there, aren't there?"

"Yes," replied Locke, "Poole and Oliver both come from Barstone."

"Poole and Oliver. Are you any relation of theirs?"

"No relation, but we've always been like brothers. We have been brought up together."

"Indeed!" said Parsons; "well, now understand that you and Ives will have to do the work of my room."

"I thought Dickeson——" began Locke.

"I don't know what you thought," said Parsons shortly, "but Dickeson has leave from study fagging, and therefore you, as the next junior, have to do it. And you'd better look sharp about what you're set to do, and keep a civil

tongue in your head—which is more than your friends do. If you don't, things are likely to go badly with you."

Having delivered himself of this speech, Parsons seized his boating cap and jacket, and hurried down to Ferris's boat-house to take his usual row, in preparation for the cup race, which would now take place in another fortnight. He had learned something from Gabbett about the close companionship which subsisted between the two Fourth Form boys and this new junior, young Locke; and it occurred at once to him that he had found at last the means, by which he could make them feel the consequences of their insolence. They evidently cared little for the annoyances he might impose, or even the kicks and cuffs he might occasionally bestow on them, but they *would* care for the annoyances, the kicks and the cuffs, if transferred to Herbert Locke. He had put the question to the latter respecting Charlie and Harry, by way of experiment, and was satisfied from his reply that it was as he supposed. Thereupon he resolved forthwith to commence his operations. His first step was to give to Dickeson the exemption from house fagging, which every monitor had the privilege of bestowing upon one junior; and which Dickeson accordingly received, as much to his surprise as to his satisfaction, that same evening. The effect of this, as the reader has heard, was to make Locke one of the two regular room fags belonging to Parsons. This was a light or a heavy burden, according as the monitor chose, and Parsons took care that it should be as heavy as possible. Locke found that he had not ten minutes to himself from the time when he returned to the

boarding-house after school, to the time when he left it to enter school again. Now he was set to tidy out Parsons's room, and to remove the stains of wet mud from the carpet; now he was set to clean Parsons's pistols, with which he and Empson or Garland had been amusing themselves at the "Silver Eel," or to cast bullets, or to polish up the flasks; now he had to toast bread for the breakfast or tea of Parsons and his friends, or boil eggs, or fry sausages; now to arrange Parsons's fishing tackle, or to cook the fish brought home from the Mere. Sometimes there was an imposition to be written out, which had been given to Parsons himself or one of his friends, but which Locke had to do. When there was no work to be done, Parsons took care to make some; and if, either through weariness, a mistake, or the impossibility of doing what was ordered, the tasks were indifferently executed, sharp words and heavy blows were the certain consequence. Sometimes Parsons would forget to which of his fags he had given an order, and thrash both indiscriminately; sometimes he would forget to give an order altogether, but administer a sound licking nevertheless, because it had not been performed.

Out of the boarding-house, Sykes took up the running, and his pace, if it did not equal that of Parsons, was nevertheless pretty sharp. Hardly a day passed but Herbert was sent down to cricket to Daly, or Greaves, or Benham, who were not only the swiftest bowlers and the hardest hitters in the school, but were notorious for never showing mercy to the juniors fagging for them. If a little fellow who was fielding for Armstrong or M'Calmont, pluckily stopped a

hard hit, or made a good catch, they would allow him to go free as a reward; but the others regarded the juniors as simply machines provided for their convenience, and noticed them in no other way than by throwing the ball hard at them, or administering a stinging box on the ear, if they let a swift ball by, or missed a catch. In fact, between the two, Herbert's time was so completely taken up, that if he had not been an exceptionally clever boy, he would have found it impossible to do his school work, and even as it was, his lessons were often badly learned, and his exercises full of faults. He concealed his troubles, as much as possible, from his two Barstone friends. But he could not succeed in doing so entirely, and Poole's indignation daily waxed hotter and hotter, and all Locke could say hardly sufficed to keep it from bursting out in some furious explosion.

One day—it was the very last of September—Parsons was greatly put out at finding that his supply of gunpowder was exhausted. He had engaged to shoot a pistol match with a young farmer at the "Eel," each party finding his own weapons. Just when he was on the point of starting on the day of the match, he found, to his great vexation, that his canister of powder, as well as his flask, was empty. He hurried to the "Eel," hoping that either Sawdon or his antagonist might be able to supply him. But the landlord declared he hadn't "a mossel," and the farmer gruffly answered that he had only just enough for himself. Finding that Parsons, in consequence, could not shoot the match, the bucolic, already wroth at having been kept half an hour waiting, swallowed the rest of his ale, and took himself off

in dudgeon, muttering that "a 'greement was a 'greement, and if folks made 'greements, they ought to keep to them!"

Parsons returned home as savage as the farmer—a fact of which his unlucky fags soon became aware.

"If ever you leave me without a sufficient supply of powder, caps, and bullets again," he said, "I'll just flay you both alive. Now, be off, and don't bother me any more to-night."

The boys retired, too glad to be released, and Parsons betook himself, before going to bed, to look out his rowing things for the great contest, which (as the reader knows) was to take place on the next day. He was greatly set on winning the sculling prize, and knew it was hardly possible he could miss it. His new boat had turned out better than his fondest hopes had pictured, and there was none belonging to any one in Westonbury that could match it. He had been careful not to allow any one to know how fast he could row in her. But he had timed himself, and found that he could do the course from the boat-house to the Earl's Refuge, in ten seconds under the time in which the winner of the previous year was known to have accomplished it. There were some good scullers in the school, no doubt. Daly had been third when Polson won, and had come in a length only behind Sydenham. Greaves, again, was a very powerful, though not a neat, rower. And there was Armstrong, who, though of small account last year, had greatly improved during the present season, and was now a first-rate hand. If their boats had been as good as his, there might be a question. As it was, unless some unforeseen accident should occur, there was none.

Parsons was quite resolved that nothing of the kind should interfere with his victory. His ruling weakness was vanity—the love of pre-eminence, whether deserved or not. Others, who coveted distinction, might have demurred to attaining it by such means as the ownership of a better boat than the rest, and would rather not win at all, than win by anything except their own skill or strength. But Parsons was troubled with no scruples of this kind. So long as he was acknowledged as the winner, and was publicly presented by Mrs. Formby with the prize, as had been the practice for many years past at Westonbury—so long as he sat on the right hand of the captain of the Westonbury boating club at the monitors' supper, which followed after the skiff race, and heard his health proposed as the winner of the day—he cared little whether his victory was one really deserved or not. He cast an anxious glance at the sky when he woke on the following morning. If there was anything that could endanger his success, it would be a high wind, as this would disturb the exact trim of his boat, which was one of its principal merits. To his great delight the morning was perfectly calm, one of those delicious autumnal days which summer seems to bequeath us as a parting gift.

Morning school passed without any remarkable occurrence. As soon as it was over, the whole school hastened down to Ferris's boat-house, whence the start was to take place, as soon after twelve o'clock as could conveniently be managed. The banks of the lake presented a very lively and pleasing spectacle. All the eight-oars belonging to the different boarding-houses, as well as several four-oars, had resolved to

accompany the race—it being one of the chief merits of the Mere that its great breadth allowed almost any number of boats to row side by side without interfering with the racing skiffs. There was West's boat, which carried Meyler, the *ex officio* umpire, as head monitor, with their red jerseys and white caps with scarlet tassels and bands. There was Norman's, the victors of the last eight-oar contest, with the purple and gold, always worn by the winners of the year; there were the other eights, with their colours of blue, green, and orange, among which Marsh's was especially conspicuous for its white jersey and deep crimson rosettes. The whole lake seemed alive with the light boats glancing here and there under the bright October sun, and the air rang with the merry voices, predicting the success of their various champions.

A little before twelve, the competitors, six in number, stepped into their boats, which had been carefully examined by their owners before starting, to make sure that everything was in perfect order. Greaves, of Sinclair's, was the first to issue from the boat-house. He was the tallest and stoutest boy in the school, and though not particularly popular with the "ὁι πολλοί," received nevertheless a considerable amount of applause. He was succeeded closely by Daly and M'Calmont. The first-named was, next to Parsons and Armstrong, considered the most likely to win. He was tall and lean, and his green jersey and white rosette did not particularly become him. But the occupants of Holbeach's boarding-house gave him a warm reception, as did those of West's to their hero M'Calmont. Then Armstrong appeared

on the scene, and was greeted with a burst of welcome which extended far beyond his own immediate compatriots, and showed his general favour in the school. The applause bestowed might in some degree be due to the neatness of his appearance. He was a handsome well-made lad, and his boat and he fitted one another as though they were a part of the same piece of mechanism. The former had been coloured white with a crimson edging, to match his own accoutrements, and rode the water like a swan. After a short delay the party was joined by Garland, looking somewhat heavy in the pretentious purple and gold which belonged that year to Norman's boarding-house.

All the competitors were now in their places, excepting the one most generally expected to win—Parsons of Marsh's. Knowing how eagerly he had looked forward to the day, and how extreme was his anxiety to succeed, his absence occasioned considerable surprise. It was always, however, usual to allow sufficient time for all to assemble who meant to take part in the race, and for a quarter of an hour or so, no public notice was taken of the delay. When, however, the deep sound of the cathedral clock was heard, notifying that it was a quarter-past twelve o'clock, inquiries began to be made. Empson, in particular, who was regarded as Parsons's main supporter on all public occasions, was appealed to to give some account of his non-appearance. But Empson professed himself as ignorant as his schoolfellows as to its cause. "I came out of school with him," he said, "about three-quarters of an hour ago, and I don't know, I am sure, what there could be to delay him. He had his jersey on all

ready before he went into school. He had nothing to do, so far as I know, but to put on his hat and come down here."

"Well, we can't wait much longer," said Daly, who, to say the truth, though he would have done nothing to prevent Parsons from rowing, was not altogether sorry that his most formidable antagonist should be withdrawn from the contest—"it 's Parsons's own fault if he isn't here in reasonable time. If we don't start pretty soon now, we shan't have got the race over in time to get back to dinner."

"Wait till half-past," suggested Empson. "That will enable fellows to get back to their boarding-houses, if they look sharp, and I am sure Parsons would not have been late if he could possibly have helped it. Won't that do, Meyler?"

The umpire thus appealed to, answered, that there was no rule, so far as he knew, as to the exact time when the boats must start. But it was plain that the race could not take place at all, unless they started pretty soon. The best way would be for the race to begin the moment the cathedral clock struck half-past, and any one who was not in his place at the start, must take the consequences.

The others assented to this. Watches were taken out, and anxiously examined. It wanted only two or three minutes to the appointed time, when Parsons at last made his appearance—hurrying on apparently as fast as he could, but with an awkward shuffling gait, that procured him a volley of not very complimentary remarks from his fellow-monitors.

"Now then, Parsons, what on earth has kept you all this

time? We have been waiting almost half an hour for you. Come, tumble into your boat," continued Empson, "it 's all ready for you. Bestir yourself, man alive, or you will miss the start even now. They are to be off at the stroke of the half-hour, and it can't want a couple of minutes to the time."

Parsons made no reply to the numerous questions addressed him. He stripped off his coat and waistcoat, handed them, together with his watch, cravat, and braces, to one of the juniors of his house, who was standing by; stepped, though with apparent difficulty, on board his boat; and seizing the sculls, pushed her out to the place where the others were already arranged in line. He had hardly reached his station, when the stroke of the clock was heard, and the skiffs all shot off together.

Parsons was very unwilling to explain the causes of his delay. He had had a series of misfortunes, if indeed, they could be so called, and they had greatly provoked his temper. The reader will remember that he had given orders to his fags on the previous evening, to procure him without delay all the requisites for his pistol match, which was to come off as soon as the farmer could again be persuaded to agree to it. His orders had been obeyed more promptly than he had expected. Immediately after early school his two fags had hurried into the town, running at the top of their speed—the one to the gunmaker's shop, and the other to the plumber's. Their object in making this unusual expedition was, that they might not miss the race in the middle of the day. Having obtained the articles by means

of notes which Parsons had given them, they returned with the same speed. But they found that the boys had already left the boarding-house for the school, and there was only just time for them to get in before the gates were locked. They accordingly placed the packages, some on a small round table by the fireplace, and some on the central table of the room, and then catching up their books, ran as fast as they could into school. During school-time, James Watt, who had taken down Parsons's boating jacket to be repaired, had brought it back, and laid it on the table over Ives's packages. When Parsons hurried in, he was in too much haste to look at anything but his boating cap, which was hanging on a peg against a wall, and his jacket laid out on the table. Catching these two up, he was on the point of rushing out at the door, when a crash informed him that he had upset something in his haste, and almost immediately afterwards the explosion of several pistol caps, on which he had trodden, informed him that the floor was strewn with articles which it would be extremely dangerous for him, in more senses than one, to leave there. Angrily anathematizing the excessive zeal which his fags had displayed, he set himself to pick up the various articles as quickly as possible. He replaced the spilt gunpowder in its case, and deposited it in the cupboard. He gathered up the caps, which were scattered all over the floor, getting more and more vexed at the time thus wasted. Supposing that he had collected all, he was just closing the box, when he saw under the small round table two or three which he had overlooked. He made a rapid movement towards them, and in so doing

upset the table in question. The next moment he started up with a howl of pain. He had received a heavy blow on the foot, which hurt him so much that he could hardly stand. He sank back into his chair, faint and sick for the moment, believing that his foot was crushed. In a few minutes he recovered himself sufficiently to hobble to his washhand-stand, and drink some water. He then looked on the ground to see what it was that had hurt him, and perceived a large lump of lead, which had doubtless been got in conformity with his order, to be made into bullets. He was resolved that whoever had been so stupid as to leave it in such a place, should atone for his offence by a sound thrashing. Meanwhile what was he to do? It would be useless sending a message to Meyler to request that the race might be put off. Such a thing had never been heard of, and besides, there was no one to send. Was it possible that he could still row? He was determined to do so if he could, and if he could once get down to the Mere, he thought he could sit in his boat all right. He took a stick, and half hobbling, half hopping, managed to get downstairs and out of the school precincts without meeting any one. He then hurried along as quickly as he was able, taking the most unfrequented way, being every now and then compelled to rest. It struck the quarter-past by the cathedral clock, as he reached the bank of the Lynd. It was not a quarter of a mile from thence to Ferris's boat-house, and under ordinary circumstances he could have accomplished it in two or three minutes, but it was a different matter now. It was all he could do to get to the boat-house, and on board

his skiff, as the reader has heard, before the clock chiming the half-hour gave notice of the start.

Once in his boat, he found himself, as he had expected, much less inconvenienced by the hurt he had sustained. The lead had struck him just on the instep of the left foot, and by throwing his weight as much as possible on to the other leg, he was enabled to row almost—but only almost—as well as usual. The moment the competitors were off, all the other boats started too; while those who could not find accommodation in them, ran along the shore of the lake, each vociferously cheering the champion of his own house. For the first two or three hundred yards they all kept pretty well together, Daly, Parsons, and Armstrong, evidently reserving themselves for the severe struggle which might be expected. About half-way to the winning-post they began to draw away from one another. M'Calmont and Garland fell hopelessly into the rear, and Greaves, though his superior strength enabled him to continue the struggle somewhat longer, yet every minute visibly lost ground, which he was unable to recover. Daly and Parsons were now leading, both obviously doing their best. Armstrong was about half a length behind, rowing a steady and even stroke, but not apparently putting out his whole strength. It was any one's race, and as the island drew nearer and nearer the acclamations of the spectators increased in eagerness. Sinclair's, West's, and Norman's had now no chance of carrying off the prize; and the boys belonging to them almost universally bestowed their applause on Armstrong, who was a general favourite in the school. Those belonging to Saunders's, who

had no representative, had done so from the first. Armstrong's name, therefore, was shouted on every side, almost drowning the cries in favour of Daly's, while that of Parsons could hardly be heard at all. It seemed as if Armstrong felt himself bound to respond to the cries raised on his behalf. When within about two hundred yards of the goal, he put on his fastest pace, and in twenty strokes or so overtook Daly, who had fallen a little behind Parsons, the nose of his boat being nearly about level with the other's rowlock. Daly struggled desperately to hold his own, but in vain. His rival gradually crept away from him, gaining also on Parsons, until when the last hundred yards only lay before them, they were scull and scull.

The lookers-on were now almost frantic with excitement. The race lay between the most popular and the most unpopular boy in the school; but the spectators, knowing nothing of the secret of Parsons's mishap, generally believed that their favourite had no real chance. It was plain to them that for some reason or other Parsons was not rowing his best, and they not unnaturally supposed that he had been keeping back until the decisive moment came, and would then shoot away from his antagonist without much difficulty. His muscular and wiry frame, in which there was not one atom of superfluous flesh, was a curious contrast to the light and graceful figure of his opponent; and his boat, as has been before observed, shot through the water as light and swift as a sea-bird. But to the surprise of every one, he could not get away from Armstrong, though it was now clear that he was exerting his powers to the very utmost. His

features were distorted, either by anger or pain, and as they approached the winning-post he seemed to have some difficulty in retaining his seat. Armstrong moved steadily away from him, increasing his distance until he was nearly a length clear. And now the flagstaff, raised in front of the old ruin which went by the name of the Earl's Folly, was passed; the umpire fired his pistol to mark the conclusion of the race; and Armstrong, running his boat ashore, was received with a volley of applause by his friends on the bank. Parsons and Daly followed so close to one another, that the umpire could not decide between them. Greaves came next, ten or twelve lengths behind; and the remaining two paddled in, shortly afterwards, having given up the race some five minutes previously.

CHAPTER XVI.

"I SAY," said Burnet, addressing his neighbours, as they sat in their places in school, one day early in November, awaiting the arrival of Mr. Holbeach, "I say, do you know what a row there is going to be in Westonbury? Old Colonel Treville, one of the Members, is dead, and there's going to be a fresh election."

"That won't make much of a row," observed Pratt, who was sitting next him. "There was a new Member elected the first half I was here—Mr. Wharton, you know. But there was hardly any fuss at all—no bands or colours, and no row at the hustings. If one hadn't been told, one would hardly have known that there was anything going on."

"Ah, I dare say," rejoined Burnet; "but that was a different pair of boots altogether from this. Mr. Wharton lives in the town, and is very popular, and employs a great number of people; and he is a friend of Lord Westonbury's into the bargain, so that no one was inclined to contest it with him. But it's different now. Lord Lyndford is going to stand, and the Liberals won't have it. There will be a regular kick-up. You see if there isn't."

"Who is going to stand against him?" asked Wilkie.

"A fellow called Simpson, or Simcox, or some such name, I believe."

"Simcox! What, that fellow that has built a big house out on the Shalcombe Road, a retired grocer, or some such thing—is he going to put up?" asked Poole.

"That's the party," returned Burnet; "but he wasn't a grocer, I fancy, but a slopseller in a large way. Anyhow, he has made a frightful lot of money, and throws it about him right and left. He is an out-and-out Radical, and stumps it, no end, in the back slums of the town."

"He won't get in," remarked Oliver, contemptuously.

"Perhaps not," said Burnet; "but old Rudd, the bookseller, thinks it a very doubtful matter, and he knows as much of Westonbury as most people. Old Briggs, too, who is the Blue agent, is said to be quite in a way about it."

"Is Lord Lyndford a clever fellow?" asked Poole, "can he spout pretty well?"

"I don't know," said Burnet. "He was a boy here, you know, and has the credit of having been rather a good scholar, and I think he took honours at Cambridge. But he has been a long time abroad, I fancy, and only came home last summer."

"Aye, from Italy, when he heard old Treville was dying. I heard that, I remember now," said Wilkie. "I say, will the fellows be allowed to go and see the fun?"

"It depends on what you call the fun," replied Burnet. "There will be the bands and processions going about, and lots of chaff, no doubt; and any one may see and hear all that, if he likes, I suppose. But if it were to come to a regular mill, old Formby would shut up the gates, I expect, and keep the school in, until it was over."

"Yes, but upon the nomination day—shall we be allowed to go up to the hustings, and hear the speeches?"

"I can answer that," said Pratt. "I remember what happened last time, and what, I was told then, had always been the custom. There were places kept on the hustings for half a dozen of the Sixth Form; and any of the other fellows that liked, were allowed to go into the market-place, along with one of the masters. But they were required to promise, that if there was any row, they would all go home the moment he desired them."

"Well, I should think it would be great fun," observed Oliver. "I suppose you 'll go, Charlie, won't you, when the day comes?"

"We 'll all go," said Wilkie, "and take Locke with us."

"I should like that," cried Oliver, "only I am afraid that beast Parsons won't let Herbie go. There 's hardly a day that he doesn't give him something to keep him in the whole of play-time."

"Aye, I know that," said Wilkie, "though I had forgotten it at the moment. Old Daddy Hutton was telling me about it yesterday. Locke never complains, but bears it all like a plucky young chap, as he is. But Daddy says it puts him in such a rage, that he can hardly keep from telling Parsons to his face, what a brute and snob he is. I am pretty sure I shall do so myself some day!"

"You had better not do that, Jack," remarked Pratt.

"Well, I've no doubt that the blackguard would lay into me savagely enough, but I would stand a sharpish thrashing to have the pleasure of telling him my mind. Did you hear

what he did to Herbie a week or two ago? You know the monitors' supper was at our house, because Armstrong, one of our fellows, won. Well, Empson as head, ought to have had the ordering of the supper, but he gave up the whole management to Parsons——

"He gives up pretty well everything to his management," remarked Oliver. "To be sure, there isn't much to choose between the two. If he would give up everything to Armstrong, now, that would be something like."

"He won't do that, I'll take my oath of it," said Wilkie. "Well, to go on. First of all, Parsons put off the supper two or three weeks, until his foot was quite well again——"

"Aye, that foot of his," interrupted Pratt, "he says that lost him the race. Do you know how he really hurt it?"

"He chooses to lay it all upon Locke," said Oliver, "but the truth is he sent Herbie for a lump of lead, and knocked it off the table on to his own foot. But he persisted in it, that Herbie had placed it there on purpose, and has been more savage with him ever since."

"If he could be," remarked Wilkie. "Well, to go on with my story. Parsons chose to have a lot of things at the supper that are not allowed—wine and punch, among others. He ordered Locke to go down to the 'Cross Keys' to get them."

"'Cross Keys,'" repeated Burnet, "where is that? not that low pothouse, I suppose, down behind Nicolson's factories, which you pass on the way out to Shalcombe?"

"Yes, that's the place," said Wilkie; "about the lowest pothouse, as you say in Westonbury."

"And what on earth did Parsons pick out that for?" rejoined Burnet: "he might get wine and spirits, if he wanted them, nearer home than that, as well as at a more respectable place."

"I'll tell you why he picked it out," rejoined Wilkie. "Just because he knew quite well that Locke wouldn't go there. I don't suppose he would have consented to bring in the spirits and the wine at all; but it was just possible, you see, that leave might have been given to have them; or that Herbie might, anyhow, have thought so. But the 'Cross Keys' is in a part of the town, which the fellows have been strictly ordered not to go near. You remember, don't you, Marsh speaking about it, soon after the beginning of the half?"

"Yes, of course," said Oliver: "some fellows had been caught out of bounds, and Marsh told us that part of Westonbury was a shocking bad neighbourhood, and he hoped we should, none of us, go into it, even when we had leave to go and see friends in the town. I've no doubt you're right, Jack. Parsons knew that Marsh had said all that, and that Herbie had heard it. Well, go on, what happened next? It is odd I never heard this."

"I shouldn't have heard it," rejoined Wilkie, "if Daddy hadn't told me. Herbie himself never says anything. Well, Parsons told him to go down with a basket in the dusk, just before locking up, and get a lot of brandy and rum, and put it at the bottom of the basket, and after that to go to the grocer's for some tea and sugar, and other things, and put them on the top. If he was met by any one, he was to swear there was nothing but groceries."

"And Herbert refused, I suppose?"

"Yes, of course," said Wilkie. "Parsons knew quite well, as I said before, that he would refuse."

"What did he do?" asked Oliver.

"Gave him first of all two or three stinging boxes on the ear, as hard as he could drive," answered Wilkie, "then gave him the order over again. Herbert still refused. Then he made him hold out his hand and gave him half a dozen sharp cuts over it with the back of a hair-brush. Herbert's hand was so swollen he could hardly write. Then he boxed his ears again, and pulled his hair till it came out by handfuls, and wound up by saying that if he didn't bring in the things as he ordered that evening, he would give him twice as much."

"The brute!" said Pratt. "However, Locke did get the spirits. I know that, because they had the punch at supper; and Armstrong and Holloway, and one or two others, went away when it was put on the table."

"That 's true," said Wilkie, "but Locke didn't get it. I believe he would have been cut in two, rather than do it. But old Daddy, who had heard it all, took the basket, and went to the 'Cross Keys' himself."

"Well done, old Hutton," exclaimed Oliver, "and he a big fellow high up in the Fifth, too. I owe him one for that."

"And I another," added Wilkie. "He said he couldn't help doing it. It was either that, or licking Parsons, monitor as he was, till he couldn't stand over him."

"It's a pity he didn't choose the other," said Oliver. "Don't you think so, Charlie? Why, you haven't said a word, I declare, all this time!"

"Don't speak to me about it, Harry," returned Poole, in a low voice, "I can't talk about it, and that's a fact; and, luckily, here is Holbeach."

Burnet's information as to the approaching election of a Member for Westonbury was in the main correct. For generations past the Westonbury family had nominated to both seats; but their influence had been seriously diminished by the establishment of several large factories in the town. On the occurrence of the last vacancy, the Earl was glad to acquiesce in the election of Mr. Wharton, who, though a millowner, was nearly of his school in politics. But now it was evident that the Liberals meant to make a determined effort to shake off the connection between the borough and his family. The vacancy had been expected for some months, and Lord Lyndford had returned from Italy early in the summer, in anticipation of it. The old colonel lingered till November, and he had hardly been laid in his grave when a fierce struggle commenced. Placards and squibs covered the walls; bands in blue and yellow paraded the town. Lord Lyndford made addresses in the town hall, and Mr. Simcox stumped it at dissenting chapels and mechanics' institutes, and both parties canvassed unceasingly.

As the time of the election drew near, it became known that the contest was likely to be close, though Lord Lyndford was the favourite. Much interest was felt in the nomination, at which an exciting scene was expected. The monitors sent a letter to the Mayor, asking for the usual admission to the hustings, and the request being endorsed

by Lord Lyndford and Mr. Briggs, no less than ten places were reserved for them, while instructions were given to the police to keep a corner of the market-place clear for such of the other boys as wished to be present. The head master made no objection to these arrangements, having ascertained that a sufficient staff of constables had been provided to prevent all likelihood of a disturbance, and that Mr. West would accompany the juniors.

"You mean to go, I suppose?" said Wilkie to Charlie and Harry, as they sat at breakfast on the morning of Friday, November the 13th. "School will be over at half-past eleven, and the business doesn't begin till twelve. And it is going to be a fine day, I expect, after all. Poor Herbert can't come, as I expected, but there's nothing to prevent us."

"Oh, yes, we mean to go," returned Poole. "Only I don't know how we shall do for dinner; I expect it will take two hours good, if not more."

"Never mind the dinner," said Oliver. "We'll eat more at breakfast and tea to make up for it. Besides, we can get something at Ginger's."

At twelve o'clock, accordingly, a great many of the bigger boys were assembled in the market-place—a large open square with the town hall in the centre. In anticipation of possible disturbances, the Mayor had taken unusual precautions. A rough boarding had been run up, dividing the space in front of the hustings into two even portions, one side being given up to the supporters of the Blue, the other to those of the Yellow, faction. These halves had been

further subdivided immediately under the hustings after the same manner; so that in the event of a riot the mob would be unable to act together. The entrances to these enclosures were kept by the police, who, however, admitted all respectable applicants without demur. As the reader has heard, a portion of one of these compartments had been kept for the college boys. Charlie and Harry, together with Wilkie, Burnet, Pratt, and several other Fourth Form boys, had soon established themselves in the corner of their compartment, and began to amuse themselves, after their fashion, with remarks on the scene passing round them, and the chief personages who were to take part in the proceedings.

"There 's Briggs," said Burnet, "and Tom Rolles, Corny's cousin, you know, with him. And there 's the Mayor, Doddridge, the buttonmaker—you remember his house, on the other side of the town, on the road to Bradleigh?"

"What, the party in a drab great-coat and spectacles, yellow gloves, and a yellow rosette?"

"No, no," returned Burnet, "that little fellow is Simcox, the Radical candidate. The Mayor, of course, wouldn't wear any candidates' colours. There 'd be an awful row if he did. No, old Doddridge is that big fellow, next but one to Simcox, in a black coat and broad-brimmed hat, a large, jolly red face, with greyish whiskers."

"Oh, aye, I see him," said Poole. "He looks jolly enough to be sure! And so that other is Simcox, is it? Well, he is a proper snob to look at, that 's certain."

"Hullo, I say, stop that," said one of the Fifth Form fellows, looking round. "If some of these Yellows overhear

you talking like that, they will kick up a row, and a pretty jolly one too."

"Who cares if they do?" asked Oliver.

"Who cares?" repeated the Fifth Form boy. "I do for one. If there came a row, West here would send us all home, and we should miss the fun. And I expect you would care even more. If the monitors got sent home through you, you would get such a licking as you would remember."

"Very well, I 'll be quiet," said Poole. "I say, Pratt, which is Lord Lyndford?"

"He is not here," said Pratt, "at least I can't see him. I suppose he is not come yet. Here they are, though," he added, as a loud shout was raised on the outskirts of the crowd, and two or three carriages, each drawn by four horses adorned with blue rosettes, drew up at the door of the town hall. "Here is his Lordship, and his proposer and seconder with him."

Amid vociferous cheering the new-comers alighted, and presently reappeared on the hustings. The first of the party was an elderly gentleman in a riding-coat, top boots, and leathers, who was instantly hailed by the mob as Sir Gregory Knyvett, of Bradleigh Park, a large owner of property in the borough. Next to him came a middle-aged man, with something of a military air, whom most of the boys recognized as Captain Spencer, the proprietor of a rather nice villa on the banks of the Lynde. The third was a tall man, a good deal younger than his companions, not more than thirty, and perhaps even less. He was very simply dressed in a dark morning coat, with a waistcoat of the same material,

light grey trousers, and a blue rosette in his buttonhole. His features were rather handsome, and his hair dark, with a slight curl. The moment he appeared on the scene, a tremendous shout was raised by the Blues, which he acknowledged by removing his hat and repeatedly bowing.

"Who 's that? who 's that?" exclaimed Poole and Oliver in the same breath, while Burnet and Wilkie stared in mute amazement.

"Who is it?" repeated Pratt, "why, who should it be but Lord Lyndford? The row these fellows are making might have told you that. What are you staring in that way for, man?" he added, a moment afterwards, as he saw the expression of Poole's face.

"Lord Lyndford!" exclaimed Poole, in consternation. "You don't mean it! I say, Harry, Jack—do you remember that day on the Rocky Island? That 's the keeper, isn't it?"

"Hold your row, you young ass, will you?" exclaimed the same Fifth Form boy who had before interfered. "You will attract everybody's attention. There is Lord Lyndford staring at you."

Charlie subsided, and the proceedings at this moment commenced. The Mayor stepped forward to begin his speech, and the attention of the bystanders was again withdrawn from the boys. Under cover of his worship's eloquence, however, Charlie contrived to exchange a few remarks, *sotto voce*, with his companions.

"It 's the fellow we saw at the Nixies' Grot, and no mistake," said Wilkie. "And, what 's more, I am afraid he has

nailed us. Look there. He is talking again to Empson and Parsons, and looking our way. I am afraid he is asking them who we are. I say, I wish I could get out of this. I don't like it at all."

"We can't move," said Oliver. "We are wedged in too tight. Besides, I dare say Lord Lyndford, if he has recognized us, won't make any row about what happened. He has got something else to think about."

"You are right, he has done talking to the monitors now," said Poole, "and is listening to Sir Gregory's speech. What a jolly old fellow! Let 's cheer him."

The boys soon forgot their momentary alarm in the excitement of the scene. Sir Gregory was followed by Captain Spencer, and he by Dr. Hawkins, the leader of the Westonbury Radicals, and he again by Mr. Nicholson, the manufacturer, and then by Lord Lyndford himself, and lastly by little Mr. Simcox, and still the interest of the boys remained as keen as ever, though the dinner at the boarding-houses had been over an hour and a half ago, and the hour for locking up was not so far off. At length the Mayor called for the show of hands, and to the great delight of the boys, it proved most unexpectedly to be in favour of the Blues, the college boys themselves contributing a very considerable item to the majority. Then the vote of thanks to the Mayor followed, and the proceedings terminated.

The boys straggled home in high spirits, amusing themselves with comments on the appearance and oratory of the several performers, and recalling the rough jokes of the mob. They reached Marsh's boarding-house, and repaired to No.

14, still full of the subject. But their mirth was very unpleasantly interrupted. A message was brought by a junior, requiring Poole's and Oliver's presence in Empson's room. On proceeding thither, they found not only the three monitors belonging to Marsh's, but the head monitor, Meyler, also.

"These are the fellows, are they?" said the last-named, as Charlie and Harry entered. "I remember you, don't I?" he continued, addressing himself to Poole: "you are the fellow, on whose account Sykes was dismissed last half, and who was pulled up by Parsons for yelling when he was replaced in office?"

"Yes," answered Poole, quietly meeting Meyler's look, which, he felt, was not a friendly one.

"Indeed. Well, Parsons, what have they been up to now? Let us get this over as quick as possible. It 's a great nuisance."

"It is soon settled," said Parsons. "Lord Lyndford has complained to me to-day, knowing me to be one of the monitors, that these two fellows have been trespassing on Lord Westonbury's grounds, and were very insolent to him when he took them to task."

"What part of his grounds were they trespassing on?" inquired Meyler.

"The Rocky Island, in Lyndmere," answered Parsons. "There is a sort of garden or summer-house there, which Lord Westonbury is very particular about keeping private."

"I know it, of course," said Meyler. "But the whole of Lyndmere is out of juniors' bounds. Who gave you two

leave to go there? I suppose, by-the-bye, you don't deny having gone there?"

"We certainly went there!" said Poole, "and fell in with Lord Lyndford, but we had Sydenham's leave."

"Sydenham's leave!" repeated Meyler, in a sharper tone, for that name did not sound pleasantly in his ears, "that is good for nothing now, even if you ever had it. And besides," he pursued, interrupting Poole, who was beginning to answer him, "you know quite well that Sydenham neither would, nor could, have given you leave to land on the Rocky Island. It would be safe to get the whole school into a row, if any of the fellows trespassed there."

"We didn't know that," said Poole.

"Who is to prove you didn't know it?" asked Empson. "It is your business to know it. I don't think you need trouble any further, Meyler. These two fellows must have a school thrashing before twelve. That's the regular thing under such circumstances, isn't it, Parsons?"

"Undoubtedly," answered Parsons, "and even if it were not so, I don't think Lord Lyndford would be satisfied, unless they were made an example of. These fellows not only landed, and caught a lot of fish, but they were cheeky to Lord Lyndford himself——"

"They haven't admitted that," interposed Armstrong, "and it ought not to be taken for granted. Had either of you a row with Lord Lyndford?" he continued, turning to Poole and Oliver.

"One of our party had, but it was neither I nor Oliver," replied Poole.

"Who was it then?" asked Empson, sharply.

"It was Corny Cobbe," said Poole.

"Cobbe!" exclaimed Armstrong, "my cousin, Cobbe! Why, he left at the end of last half. Why——"

"If he is gone, we needn't trouble ourselves about him," interposed Parsons. "Well, then, Meyler——"

"Stop a minute, if you please," interposed Armstrong in his turn. "I should just like to know when this took place. I understood it was only a short time ago."

"It can't be very long," said Parsons. "Lord Lyndford hasn't been home from Italy very long."

"But when did it happen?" persisted Armstrong.

"On the twenty-fourth of June, St. John the Baptist," answered Poole.

"The twenty-fourth of June," repeated Armstrong. "Why, then this occurred last half, and Sydenham's leave was all right. I think, Parsons, it is a pity you were not more particular in your inquiries as to the day."

"I don't see that the day matters," persisted Parsons, though evidently a good deal taken aback. "As Meyler most truly observed just now, Sydenham would not, and could not, have given them leave to land and fish on the Rocky Island. Nor does it matter that it happened five months ago. It has only just come to the knowledge of the monitors, and they are bound to put this sort of thing down, as soon as they find it out, for the sake of the whole school. If a fellow was taken up for thieving, they wouldn't let him go, because he said it was done five months ago."

"Of course not," said Empson. "Let 's have done with

this. A school thrashing before twelve on Monday it is to be, isn't it, Meyler?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Meyler. "They're not in the Fifth, I am glad to say, so Sykes, not I, will have to officiate. Yes, a school thrashing before twelve on Monday. You hear, you two?"

"I'll send notice to Sykes," said Parsons. "He, too, ought to be told.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE report of what had taken place in Empson's room soon spread through Marsh's boarding-house, and from thence over the whole school. It produced everywhere the most profound sensation. A "school thrashing before twelve" had an awful sound in the ears of Westonburies. It was a thing on the whole of rare occurrence, some boys going through the school without witnessing one at all. But whoever did chance to be present at a genuine infliction of it, retained the scene ever afterwards in his memory. In the present instance it was generally expected that the thrashing would be extraordinarily severe. It was reported—Parsons took care that his agents should spread the rumour everywhere—that Lord Lyndford had been grossly insulted, and extreme measures must be resorted to to atone for such an offence as that. Therefore Sykes would be ordered to lay it on hard and sharp, and to the number, perhaps, of thirty or forty cuts. He was a tall, muscular fellow; and it was further known that he bore a bitter dislike to both boys, and needed no stimulants to induce him to exert all his strength.

On the other hand, Poole and Oliver had a reputation in the school for daring and determination beyond their years. It was rumoured that they had faced the monitors who called them to account, with a coolness which had roused their anger to a greater degree than they had felt at first; and let

Sykes thrash them as he might, they would never knock under. It would be in all likelihood a terrible sight to witness. When the door had been closed at the departure of the masters after morning school on Monday—as was always done by the junior monitor on the occasion of a public thrashing—there fell so dead a silence, that the sound of a pin dropping on the ground might have been heard.

"Every one keep his place," said Meyler, stepping forward. "Where is the manager?"

"Here," said Sykes, coming forward with a formidable whalebone in his hand, and an expression of malignant satisfaction on his face.

"Poole and Oliver, of Marsh's, come here."

The two boys obeyed, and advanced into the middle of the school. Their faces were pale, but firmly set, and they eyed Sykes and his weapon with resolute calmness.

"For landing, contrary to the well-known rule," proceeded Meyler, "on Rocky Island, and insulting Lord Lyndford——"

"Just wait one moment, if you please," said Armstrong, moving forward. "Every fellow, before he undergoes a school thrashing, has a right to appeal to the Council of Five. I appeal to it now in behalf of Poole and Oliver. The right to do so, I conclude, will not be disputed."

"Of course not," remarked Holloway, "it is a well-known rule."

"You give a great deal of trouble, Armstrong," said Meyler, pettishly. "But if you insist, I suppose we must go, *pro formâ*, through this. However, as every one of the

council—myself, Holloway, Empson, Daly, and Benham—all have heard the particulars of this business already, we can't go through it again. I have only to say, therefore, that my mind is made up that these fellows deserve the thrashing they are going to have, and I don't mean to change it."

"I have heard the whole thing through," added Empson, "and I am entirely of the same opinion. If either Daly or Benham agree with Meyler and me, that settles the matter."

"Well," said Daly, "if Lord Lyndford complained, as I understand he did, of having been insulted by these juniors, they ought to have a severe licking. Lord Lyndford is a gentleman, and a good-natured fellow too, and he would not have complained, unless it had been something very bad."

"I agree in that," put in Benham; "if he wants them licked, they ought to be."

"And so should I," said Holloway, "if I were sure Lord Lyndford *did* want them licked. But all depends on that. Who was the monitor to whom he expressed such a wish?"

"It was to me," said Parsons, "I stood next to him on the hustings."

"And he told you, did he, Parsons, that he wanted these fellows to be thrashed?" asked Armstrong.

"He mightn't have said so in so many words," returned Parsons. "But he gave me clearly to understand, that he thought serious notice ought to be taken of the matter, or he couldn't feel satisfied."

"Indeed?" rejoined Armstrong. "Then I must say that he has changed his mind on the subject very quickly, as well

as very entirely, since Friday. Perhaps, Meyler, you will allow me to read aloud a letter, which I have this morning received from him about this business."

Parsons's face fell at this unexpected request, and he looked for the moment quite confounded. The next instant he rallied, and stooping down, whispered something in Empson's ear. The latter again addressed Meyler.

"Meyler," he said, "I object to Armstrong's continued meddling. He is not one of the Five, and has no right to speak. I have no doubt he has been practising on Lord Lyndford's good-nature, to try and get these fellows off. But we are the best judges of our own affairs, and don't want his interference."

"The strict rule," said Meyler, "no doubt is, that only the Five can debate the question. If you require me to enforce it, I must, of course, stop Armstrong. And I think we had better get this thrashing over, or we shall be here all day. Sykes, are you ready?"

"One moment, if you please," said Holloway, blushing and stammering, as he found himself the centre of all eyes. "You are right about allowing none but the Five to interfere; but I am one of the Five, and therefore, I conclude, I may read out Lord Lyndford's letter."

"If you insist, I suppose you must," said Meyler, in a tone of annoyance.

"Very well. Armstrong, be so good as to hand it to me."

No further objection could be raised; and the boys, leaning forward in breathless anxiety, listened as Holloway read it out. Parsons muttered a few oaths under his breath, but,

as if aware that his game was up, moved back behind the other monitors. The letter ran as follows:

"LYNDFORD ARMS, *Monday, Nov.* 16, 18—.

"MY DEAR MR. ARMSTRONG,—I have to thank you very much for your letter. I should have been extremely vexed if the juniors, whom I saw at the nomination on Friday, and respecting whom I spoke to one of the monitors, had been thrashed in consequence of anything that I said. I can quite appreciate the kind feeling towards myself, and the jealousy for the credit of the school, which has led to the resolution, of which you tell me. But the monitor to whom I spoke, has entirely, though doubtless unconsciously, mistaken my meaning. I mentioned the affair at the Rocky Island, merely as an amusing joke, a thing which not only had been entirely condoned, but of which I retained a pleasant recollection. Moreover, I said particularly, that the only trespasser on the island, so far as I knew, was not one of the hustings party. There would not, therefore, even upon the severest view of the matter, be any justification for punishing any one. I ought, I think, to add, that the only other one of the party with whom I exchanged any words, was a remarkably pleasant-spoken and gentlemanly lad. I thank you very much for the kind wishes for my success, which you express. The poll will not be made known till to-day at noon. But I am able to say that I have been returned by a decisive majority.

"I am, yours faithfully,

"LYNDFORD."

The boys listened to this letter with great and ever-increasing interest, and the last words were almost drowned in a burst of cheering. "Three cheers for Lord Lyndford!" shouted Armstrong, springing on the table, and waving his hat over his head. The boys gave them lustily, and it was some time before the attention of any one was recalled to the matter immediately in hand. At length silence was sufficiently restored to allow of Holloway's voice being heard.

"I suppose the boys may go, may they not?" he said. 'I take it for granted that the idea of thrashing these juniors is at an end."

"Of course it is," observed Daly. "Why, Lord Lyndford says that they did not trespass, and were not at all insolent to him. I can't understand how the idea arose that they were."

"It was Parsons's report of what he said," remarked Benham. "I must say, Parsons, I wish you would be more careful in what you repeat. If these fellows had been thrashed, and Lord Lyndford had heard of it, the school might have got into no end of a row."

As he spoke he put on his hat, and walked out of the school, followed by the other monitors. Parsons, who had been too wise to urge anything in his own defence, kept in the background as much as possible until the room was nearly emptied, and then made the best of his way to Marsh's. Arrived there, he shut himself up in his study, and sat down to ruminate over his discomfiture. Those impudent young scoundrels had beaten him again. Three times had he put on the gloves, so to speak, with young Poole and his friend,

and three times they had come off triumphant. If that meddling fool Armstrong had not interfered, they would any way have got a tremendous licking; and though it might afterwards have been proved to be a mistake, and he might have to express his regret for it, that would not have undone the pain they had suffered. He ground his teeth as he remembered how near he had been to winning, and yet had lost after all. Well, there might yet be a fourth encounter, the issue of which would make up for every defeat.

He was interrupted by the entrance of Herbert Locke with the coalscuttle. Added to his other duties, there was now that of continually keeping Parsons's fire in exactly the proper state, neither too large nor too low, under the usual penalty of a sharp cut with a cane, or a ringing box on the ear, if it failed either way. Parsons contemplated him with considerable satisfaction. Here, at all events, he had the better of Poole and Oliver. Here was a crevice in their coat of armour, where he might drive his weapon in to the hilt.

"Oh, here you are, are you?" he exclaimed. "Confound you, why didn't you bring the scuttle before? Do you see how low the fire has got?"

"Jem was out," replied Locke; "he has only just come back."

"You've always some excuse," growled Parsons. "Have you got the sardines from Garton's and the Bologna sausages?"

"Yes," returned the other, "they are in the cupboard."

"Have you looked up my football things, and had new strings put to the pads?"

"Yes," said Herbert, "they were sent back this morning."

"Have you cast the three dozen bullets?"

"I've cast two dozen; there wasn't time before school to do all."

"You lazy young brute, you're always shuffling. Be off and finish the other dozen, and take that with you to quicken your movements."

Herbert limped to the door under the pain of a heavy kick he had received, but was stopped by—

"And when you've done the bullets, here are two hundred lines of Horace to write out for Gabbett. He wants them before morning school to-morrow."

"Oh, Parsons, I can't do them!" exclaimed Locke, driven at last to desperation. "I have had my exercise back from Manson to correct, because it wasn't done properly, and I have a copy of verses to do besides, and my Xenophon and Cæsar to learn. I shan't have a moment's time for anything besides them. Indeed, I'm afraid I can't even get through my lessons."

"Take yourself off, you whining young idiot," shouted Parsons, "if you don't want this Sophocles thrown at your head; and see you bring me those Horace lines in time, or I'll cut the soul out of your body."

Herbert retreated to his room, which he had to himself that day, Hutton chancing to be absent. He sat down at his table, for the first time fairly broken down. He had been resolved not to complain, but to bear patiently whatever was laid upon him. That had been his father's teaching—that no more trial is imposed on any one, than he is able, by the help of God's strengthening Spirit, to bear. He

was to ask that, and go on in faith; and hitherto his quiet prayers and simple trust had carried him safely through his difficulties. But now they seemed getting too much for him. Mr. Manson had grown more and more dissatisfied with his school work, little suspecting the true reason of his shortcomings. He had now threatened to write to Mr. Locke complaining of him. If he should break down in his lessons to-morrow, or if his verses should again be full of mistakes, Mr. Manson would be pretty sure to fulfil his threat; and then what would become of him? He sobbed aloud as he thought of his father's grief and surprise, and covering his face with his hands, took refuge in prayer.

Meanwhile, there was joy and triumph in No. 14. Poole and Oliver, glad as they were to escape the terrible thrashing designed for them, were still more rejoiced at the discomfiture of their enemy.

"Did you see Parsons's face," asked Harry Oliver, "when Lord Lyndford's letter was being read out? I never saw a fellow look so completely done for."

"I watched him," said Poole. "He was wishing himself anywhere else. He was in an awful fright for fear the fellows should pitch into him. The monitors were properly savage. If he had not been in the Sixth, he would have got it, I expect, from some of them—Daly and Benham, to wit—pretty sharp."

"He would have got it from the juniors, anyway," said Wilkie; "he would have got a general booking, as sure as his name is Parsons."

"A booking?" repeated Oliver. "What 's that?"

"What is it?" repeated Wilkie, "why, a particularly unpleasant thing. All the fellows pelt one at the same moment with their books—perhaps thirty or forty of them together. It isn't pleasant to be hit over the head, let me tell you, with one heavy Ainsworth, let alone forty."

"No, I should think not," said Oliver, laughing. "Did you ever see a fellow get one?"

"Yes, I did," returned Wilkie, "in the first half I was here. There was a fellow named Whitley—you recollect him, don't you, Dumbie?"

Dyke responded by a wink, his usual method of affirmation.

"Well, he was an awful sneak, though pretty nearly as big as Dumbie here. How it came about was thus—Old West can't abide tobacco, and was for ever pulling the juniors up, and accusing them of smoking. One day Corny Cobbe happened to be in a particularly mischievous humour; he had got a box of new cigars, and declared that West should have the benefit of the first of them. There is, you know, under the masters' seats in school a drawer, in which the school servant keeps his brushes and black lead. Well, Corny pulled this open, and just before West came in he lighted a cigar, put it into the drawer, and shut it up.

"The lesson began, but in two or three minutes old West came out with his favourite exclamation, 'Some of you have been smoking; whoever the boy is, he had better own it at once. I shall be sure to find him out.'

"Nobody spoke. West got more savage as the smell of tobacco grew more distinct. 'If the boy doesn't at once

own it, I shall have every one in the class up separately, and then his punishment will be much more severe.'

"That not producing any effect either, West sent for Polson, who happened to be the monitor on duty.

"'Polson,' he said, 'do you not smell tobacco?'

"Polson replied that he did. Indeed, by that time Corny's cigar, which was still smouldering on, had begun to smell pretty strong.

"'Well, then, I wish you to bring up all these boys to me in regular order, and take care that none stay behind.'

"Polson obeyed, and we all marched in line close to old West, who sniffed at every fellow as he passed, but always without effect. I remember Corny's look of injured innocence as he went by; it was a sight to remember. At last the whole class had been gone through, and West hadn't been able to fasten upon any one; but the smell was as bad or worse than ever.

"'I can't stand this,' says West; 'a lot of boys must have been smoking here just before school. The class will come with me into the library, and I shall send the school servant to give my chair and the forms a thorough scouring. Polson, see the boys into the library, and then send Hicks.'

"Corny dodged to stay behind for a couple of minutes, to get the cigar out of the drawer; but Polson wouldn't let him. After school, Hicks came to West with the stump of the cigar, which he had found in the drawer. Old West was furious, and gave out the next morning that, unless the author of the outrage gave himself up, the whole class would be kept in the next holiday. The fellows wouldn't have

minded that; but Whitley, who wanted to go out to dine with some friends in the town, didn't choose to be prevented, and he went up and told West that it was Cobbe who had played the trick."

"What a beastly sneak!" exclaimed Oliver.

"I believe you, just," said Wilkie. "He thought that as he was, out-and-out, the biggest fellow in the class, they durstn't attempt anything against him; but he was mistaken. After school next day, when West went out, we all stayed in our places, each fellow with a big book in his hand. Whitley, who wasn't up to what was going on, got up to leave the school, and when he had moved off a step or two, the head fellow gave the signal, and we all let fly at him together."

"Was he much damaged?" asked Poole.

"It depends on what you call much," said Wilkie. "He was cut clean off his legs, and his head and shoulders were a mass of bruises, if that will do."

"Serve him right, too," commented Poole. "Now, it appears to me that would be just the right thing for Parsons."

"It wouldn't be bad, I allow," replied Wilkie. "Perhaps we may have the chance some day—who knows?"

The conversation was here interrupted by the arrival of the post, and a letter was put into Poole's hand.

"From Corny, I declare! What fun he always is," he added, when he had finished reading it. "Will you fellows like to hear it?"

There was an eager assent, and Charlie proceeded to read:

"CHADLEIGH VICARAGE, *Nov.* 15, 18—.

"MY DEAR CHARLIE,—I am much obliged to you for your last letter, which contained the capital news that Parsons had been floored in the skiff race by Cousin Dick. I gave myself a holiday straightway on hearing it. The Reverend Josiah, I regret to say, was narrow-minded enough to object; but I had too much regard for old friends to do any work that day. The Rev. J. B—— *is* a narrow-minded man. He objects to the humble attempts I have made to produce pen-and-ink portraits of himself and his wife, and even declared them to be 'insults.' I explained that I had endeavoured, to the best of my ability, to give a faithful representation of both, and if my skill was not equal to the task, that was hardly my fault; but he was obdurate, and has written to my aunt, from whom I expect three or four sheets of wire-wove by an early post. Please write again as soon as you can, and tell me any more of the Westonbury doings that are worth relating. I see you have an election going on there, and that a sharp contest is expected. I should think that would be good fun; but the best fun will be Parsons's being sold again for the medal. If he is, mind you tell me all about it. My benediction to Harry, Jack, Jem, and Dumbie in particular, and all other old friends in general. "Ever yours truly,

"CORN. COBBE."

"Write and give him an account of Parsons's attempt to get us thrashed for that business at the Rocky Island," said Wilkie; "he 'll be delighted with that."

"Yes, and tell him what an ass Parsons makes of himself about Lord Lyndford," said Burnet. "He has been telling the fellows that his Lordship was quite taken with him, and he was sure would ask him to the Park or somewhere, on the first opportunity."

"He didn't say that, to be sure, did he?" exclaimed Wilkie.

"Didn't he, though?" returned Burnet. "I heard some of the monitors who had been on the hustings talking about it. They said Parsons took Lord Lyndford's civility, which was intended for the school generally, as personal to himself, and that he really believes Lord Lyndford means to show him attention. They were laughing over it as a capital joke. Do write and tell him that, Charlie."

"I'll not forget it, you may be sure of that, Jem," said Poole. "I'll write this evening; but, meanwhile, I want to see Herbie Locke. He hasn't been here for the last two days."

He repaired accordingly to Locke's room, where he found his friend in the state of depression before described. Herbert tried to pluck up, and put as good a face as possible on the matter; but Poole was not to be deceived.

"I tell you what, Herbie," he said, "this state of things can't go on; it is of no use your trying to keep things from me. I know what Daddy has told Harry and Wilkie, and I could see for myself, even if he had held his tongue. I shall write to Mr. Oliver to-day, and ask him to see Mr. Locke——"

"Pray don't, Charlie," said Herbert: "you are the best

friend I have, and mean me nothing but kindness, I know; but pray don't do that. It will break up all my father's plans. He 'll take me away and give up his pupils, and that will be a terrible loss to him. Pray don't——"

"Well, then, tell me everything, and the mischief may be helped; but if you persist in saying there is nothing——"

"I *will* tell you all, Charlie," said Locke; and drawing Poole down to his side, he detailed to him his present troubles—how he could not meet Parsons's requirements, and do his own school work too—how fresh burdens were continually being laid upon him, and Manson was getting more and more dissatisfied, and had threatened to write a letter of complaint to Barstone—how he was afraid he would be ill, if this went on longer, though he had hoped to hold out to the end of the half—and how more particularly he had, at the present moment, in addition to his regular fag's work, bullets to cast for Parsons, two hundred lines of Horace to write out, and his school lessons and verses to do into the bargain.

Poole listened in silence to the various instances of Parsons's brutal usage, which, from time to time, cropped up in Herbie's narrative. He was too wise to trust himself to speak about them. When the boy had concluded, Charlie sat for some minutes thinking. Then he said:

"It wants only a few weeks to the end of the half; we may go on till then. But mark you, Herbie, I won't have you refusing help any more. Give me that bullet-mould and the lead. Harry will cast the dozen bullets; the two hundred lines of Horace we four in No. 14 will write out between us.

I'll speak to Hutton, and he will give you a construe of the "Anabasis" and "Bellum Gallicum." Tell me the theme of your verses, and I will do them for you. Meanwhile, do you go out for a walk along the banks of the Lynde, and get some fresh air."

"Do you think it right, Charlie——" began Locke.

"I have no doubt of its being right," said Poole; "and if you don't agree to all I have said, I'll write to Barstone this afternoon."

"Very well. I dare say you know best. Thank you, Charlie, and—and God bless you for your kindness." He threw his arms round Poole's neck, and kissed him.

Poole brushed hastily out of the room, not wishing Herbie to find out that he could not restrain his tears.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LORD LYNDFORD'S victory was celebrated with great rejoicings by the Blues. They had expected a very severe contest, and were even doubtful at one period whether the day would not go against them. A majority, therefore, of thirty-five was as welcome to them as it was annoying to their antagonists. The latter declared that nothing but bribery and intimidation of the most flagrant description could have so falsified their calculations; but this is a topic too commonly urged on such occasions to attract much attention, and more than one dinner was given by enthusiastic members of the victorious party to the newly-elected Member and the leading personages of his committee, in token of their satisfaction. It was while this feeling was at its height, in the school as well as out of it, that Parsons one morning, to his infinite satisfaction, received by post the following invitation:—

"'LYNDFORD ARMS,'
LORD LYNDFORD'S COMMITTEE-ROOM,
Nov. 26, 18—.

"DEAR SIR,—A public dinner is about to be given at the 'Catherine Wheel Inn,' on the evening of Tuesday next, to celebrate the triumphant return of the Conservative candidate for Westonbury; Mr. Alderman Hughes in the chair. Lord Lyndford will be present, and he, as well as the various

members of his committee, are of opinion that, considering the general good-will which was manifested by the gentlemen of the college towards his Lordship, some leading member of the school should be invited to be present as its representative on that occasion. His Lordship has desired me to address the invitation, in the first instance, personally to you; but should you unfortunately be unable to be present, we shall be happy to see any one of the senior monitors of the school who may do us the favour to attend. This invitation, of course, is dependent on the consent of the college authorities, which, however, we feel assured will be given. Do not trouble yourself to answer this.

"I have the honour to be, your very obedient servant,

"RICHARD LEE,

"Secretary of Conservative Association.

"S. Parsons, Esq., Rev. W. Marsh's,
Westonbury College."

Parsons was sitting at breakfast with his friends Empson and Garland when the letter was put into his hand. He opened it carelessly, but had hardly read two or three lines when he folded it again, and put it into his pocket, muttering something about reading it when he had leisure. He got rid of his two friends as quickly as he could, and then proceeded to study it more carefully. He had no idea, it need hardly be said, of passing on the invitation to anybody else. If anybody went, he was resolved it should be himself; but he knew also that, however confidently Mr. Lee might reckon on Dr. Formby's granting permission, it was very unlikely indeed that the Doctor would consent. Indeed, if the invi-

tation had been for any other day, Parsons would have given it up as a bad job; but Tuesday chanced to be St. Andrew's Day, and therefore one on which the boys were allowed to dine out with friends. As a monitor, he would not be required to return to Marsh's till ten o'clock. As the dinner was at six, this would give him plenty of time to attend it. If he could only get Mr. Marsh's leave to dine out with a friend that day, there would be nothing to prevent his going. He resolved, at all events, to make the attempt, and on the morning of the 30th, going into Mr. Marsh's study immediately after morning chapel, along with several other boys who came with similar applications, he informed his tutor that he had received an invitation to dine with a gentleman named Lee. He held the letter in his hand, but did not offer it to Mr. Marsh to read.

The tutor, who was very much hurried, and had no suspicion of anything unusual, gave an assent without further inquiry, and Parsons hurried off, overjoyed at his success. He had that morning finished his poem for the medal, with which he was more than ordinarily well satisfied. If he should be fortunate enough to be the winner of that prize, it would for the third time introduce him to Lord Lyndford's notice, and in that case his Lordship really might keep him in memory afterwards, which could not fail (as he assured himself) to be of the greatest advantage to him. He sat down and wrote to his father, telling him of his good fortune thus far, and of his hopes of being still more fortunate before the end of the half-year. Having posted his letter, he set out for a solitary walk, not wishing to encounter any of his

brother monitors, who might question him about the gentleman with whom he was going to dine. About half-past four he returned to Marsh's, shut himself up in his room, and proceeded to make a most elaborate toilet. He had made purchase of a set of turquoise studs, and a blue satin necktie of the correct Conservative colour. These he supplemented by a rosette, of which there were plenty left on hand in the draper's shop, and with these and his best evening suit he flattered himself that he would present a very distinguished appearance.

A little after half-past five he issued forth. The evening was dark, and inclined to be rainy; but the thick cloak, which he folded round his figure, secured him alike from the inclemency of the weather and the prying eyes of his schoolfellows. As he turned into the High Street, it struck him all of a moment that he was not quite sure where the "Catherine Wheel" was situated. He had an idea that it was one of the committee-rooms quite in the back part of the town, behind the printing mills. If so, it was a good quarter of an hour's walk. He had, however, that time to spare, and set off leisurely. He soon lost his way in the back lanes, and was obliged to ask the right direction of a policeman, who looked at him curiously—so Parsons at least fancied—as he gave him the required information. Even then the place was not easy to find. He made several wrong turns, and was obliged to apply to foot passengers two or three times before he came at length in front of the "Catherine Wheel." He looked at his watch, and found it was nearly a quarter-past six. No time was to be lost.

"Has it begun?" he asked of a waiter who was just ascending the stairs, and elbowing aside at the same time a number of roughs assembled in front of the bar—the latter being already half tipsy, and evidently on the way to become wholly so.

"Whom do you want to see, sir?" inquired the waiter.

"Mr. Lee, the Chairman of the Committee——" began Parsons.

"Oh, yes, sir, all right," returned the waiter, who was in a great hurry. "First room to the right on the top of the stairs. Follow those men there, sir."

He vanished as he spoke, and Parsons, complying with his directions, entered a large room on the next landing, in the wake of the two men referred to. Their appearance a good deal surprised him; they were shabbily dressed, and looked, in fact, little better than tramps. The room, too, was not what he had expected. It was large, to be sure, and not worse furnished than the public rooms at large inns usually are; and the gas was burning low, so that he could not distinguish very clearly the faces and dresses of its occupants. But it seemed a very strange place for Lord Lyndford and his friends to be dining at. He remembered, however, that an election brings people together, who would hardly find themselves in each other's company at another time. Anyway, it was all right about the dinner, for there was the table laid out. Observing that his presence was unnoticed, he resolved to wait until Lord Lyndford should arrive before introducing himself, and sat down in a chair near the door.

"Who are those?" exclaimed a man with a sharp and dic-

tatorial voice, who was seated at a small table writing, but who looked up as the door opened. "We want Figgins and Watkins. Are you the parties?"

The two men, with a scrape of the leg and a pull of the forelock, replied that those were their names.

"Very well," said the man with a sharp voice. "Now you, Figgins, first—Jeremiah Figgins, isn't it?"

"Yes, Mr. Lee, my name be Jeremiah."

"What's this story, Jeremiah, of your having been offered five pounds, by Mr. Westerton, for a penny print pinned against the wall?"

"Well, Mr. Lee, Mr. Westerton, he come to my house, and he asked me how I were going to vote. I told 'un I hadn't quite made up my mind. It ain't a thing to be decided on in a hurry, you see."

"I see," assented Mr. Lee. "Go on."

"Mr. Westerton tries very hard to persuade me to vote as he is going to vote, and I told 'un I'd think of it. Then he turns away, and looks round the room, and he sees a picture a-hanging against the wall, where my wife had pinned it."

"What was it a picture of?" asked another of the committee.

"Well, Mr. Hodgekin, it was a coloured print of a soldier on horseback."

"Worth about a penny, I suppose," observed Mr. Hodgekin.

"Why, no, sir, they only charges a penny for a whole sheet of them," answered Figgins, with a grin. "But Mr. Westerton he takes a great fancy to this picture, and he says that he'd look in next week, on Friday he thought, and if I

hadn't done nothing to displease him, he wouldn't mind giving me five pound for it."

"Hadn't done anything to displease *him!*" said Mr. Lee. "Are you sure he didn't say anything to displease Lord Lyndford?"

"I am not certain," said Figgins reflectively; "he might have said Lord Lyndford, to be sure."

"If he did say Lord Lyndford," said Mr. Lee, "your evidence will be important to us—important to *us*, you understand?"

"I understand," rejoined Figgins, "and I think I *could* swear that he said Lord Lyndford."

"Go on," said Mr. Lee. "Did he call on Friday?"

"Yes, he did," said Figgins, "and he paid for the horse-soldier."

"Well, we needn't ask you how you voted; the poll-book shows that. You may go, Figgins. You are quite certain that he said, 'If you vote for Lord Lyndford'?"

"Sartain sure," said the man, with a broader grin than before, as he turned to the door.

"Very well. Now you, then, Timothy Watkins," said Mr. Lee. "But before we go into this case, Hodgekin, turn up the gas, will you? I can hardly read my notes."

Mr. Hodgekin complied, and the room became suddenly light, disclosing, among other objects, Parsons still seated in the chair near the door, with his turquoise studs, his blue satin necktie, and the rosette in his buttonhole, which in his embarrassment he had forgotten.

He had become aware, during Mr. Figgins's examination,

that a strange mistake had been made by somebody. It appeared, indeed, that he was in a committee-room connected with the recent borough election; but it could not be one favourable to Lord Lyndford's interests. How the mistake had occurred he might inquire at another time; at present his object was to make his escape unnoticed. He resolved to follow Figgins out of the room as soon as his examination was over, and he might have succeeded in doing this unnoticed, if the gas had not been turned on. As it was, however, his figure and dress became in a moment distinctly visible to the astonished eyes of Mr. Lee.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, starting to his feet, with an exclamation which is not desirable to repeat. "Who are you, sir, and what do you want here?"

Parsons plucked up his courage as well as he was able. "Is Mr. Lee here?" he said, advancing.

"Yes, sir," said his questioner, more surprised than before, "I am Mr. Lee; but I am not aware that I have the pleasure of your acquaintance."

"I came here by your invitation," said Parsons.

"You did not, sir!" exclaimed Lee, angrily. "You have either come here for some impudent frolic, or as a spy of the Blue party, whose colours you wear, though I suppose you have forgotten the circumstance."

"He has heard Figgins's examination," remarked Hodgekin, in an undertone.

"I know that, and it can't be helped now; but we'll give him something which will make him think twice before he plays the spy again."



PARSONS MOBBED.—P. 277

He rang the bell as he spoke, and in another minute the intruder would have been in the hands of the Philistines, who in all likelihood would have handled him more roughly than even Poole or Wilkie would have desired. But Parsons, who was prompt and ready enough on an emergency, no sooner heard Mr. Lee's words, than he rushed precipitately to the door, overturning Watkins, who endeavoured to stop him; and springing down the stairs, was out at the inn door before the alarm was fairly raised. Then he was pursued by a dozen zealous Yellows, who yelled after him threats relative to the town pump or the nearest pond, which only caused Parsons to fly the faster. As he tore along, many of the bystanders joined in the pursuit, the boys supplementing the amusement of chasing him by plentifully pelting him with mud. He had lost his hat, and was compelled very early to throw away his cloak, together with the unlucky rosette and satin necktie, which had been the chief cause of his troubles, and which continued to excite the fury of the mob of Yellows. In this forlorn condition—hatless, cloakless, and cravatless, with his best evening suit torn and covered with mud—he reached at last the more respectable quarters of the town, where his pursuers did not deem it wise to follow him. But though he was so far safe, he did not dare to venture in his present plight into the precincts of the college—where, in all likelihood, he would be required to give an account, not only of his damaged condition, but of his reappearance so long before the hour at which those who had been dining with their friends usually returned thither. Fortunately he had his purse with him. Entering the nearest hatter's shop,

he purchased a new chimneypot and necktie, making up some story of his having been nearly upset on the river. Then going into an inn, he ordered dinner in a private room, and dried and brushed his clothes before the fire. A little before ten o'clock he issued forth, and returned to Marsh's.

During the two hours he spent at the inn, he had had time to think over what had occurred. Of course it was plain enough that a hoax had been practised upon him, and almost equally plain that one of his schoolfellows was the author of it. But which of them? Well, there were a good many who would be glad enough to play off such a trick; of that he was quite sensible. There was that young Poole and his friends to begin with—they would like nothing better; but then were they capable of composing such a letter? He took it out, and read it through again. "I hardly think that Poole's up to it," he muttered. "He's a clever fellow, but not equal to this; at least, I think not. It is more like a Sixth Form fellow's handiwork — Meyler's, perhaps. But Meyler wouldn't take the trouble. Or Benham; but Benham is just leaving—has gone to-day, I believe. Or Armstrong; but no, to do him justice, that isn't in his line—more in Empson's than his. Empson! why, to be sure it couldn't be Empson! and yet it might." Empson had kept to his compact ever since the memorable day at Shalcombe, but he evidently kept to it unwillingly. It was plain enough that if he had not been afraid of Parsons's blabbing all he knew, he would more than once have turned upon him. It was not at all unlikely that he might play just such a prank as this. "By Jove, if he had——"

As he pondered thus, his eyes lighted upon a few scraps of paper lying in the fender, the remains evidently of some which had been used for re-lighting the fire in time for his return. Was it only his fancy, or was the handwriting on them really the same as that of Mr. Lee's forged letter? He picked up the fragments and carefully compared the two. They were certainly the same! There was the same uneven straggling hand, the same peculiar formation of the capital Y's and the same f's and w's. No expert would have hesitated to declare that they were written by the same person. Here was a clue, then, and one he would not be slow in following up. Could Empson have been sitting in his room, awaiting his return, as he sometimes did, and finding the fire was getting low, have torn up an old letter to help rekindle it? or had either of those young villains, Ives or Locke, brought the paper? He could ascertain the correctness of this last conjecture, at all events. He went to the doors of their rooms, and called to them. Presently Ives, and after him Locke, appeared, each in his nightgown, with a pair of trousers hastily drawn on, and looking considerably scared.

"Come here, you young brutes. Has anybody been sitting in my room this evening, while I was away?"

"I wasn't here. I was dining with Mr. Halse," said Ives.

"You then, Locke—has any one been in my room?"

"No one that I know of," answered Locke.

"My fire was relit, I see, not very long ago. Who did that?"

"I did," said Locke; "it had gone out. I thought you would want——"

"Never mind what you thought. If you relit the fire, you used this paper?" He held out a scrap, which he had picked out of the fender.

"I suppose I did. I must have done so," replied Locke, somewhat surprised at the question.

"Where did you get the paper which you used in making up the fire?"

"Out of the bottom drawer in my cupboard. I keep waste paper there always."

"Very well. Whose handwriting is that? Is it your own?"

"No."

"Whose is it, then?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know? Well, at all events, you must know how it came into your possession. Take it, and look close at it. Understand that I mean to have an answer. A most impudent trick has been played upon me, by the person whose handwriting that is. I mean to find him out, and pay him off properly, I can tell you."

Herbert complied. He took the scrap and turned it over. There was some handwriting on the back, which he recognized only too well. It was Charlie Poole's.

Ever since his conversation with Locke, it had been Poole's practice to do his little friend's verses and themes, whenever Parsons's requirements became so exacting, that it was impossible for Herbert to do them himself. It was Charlie's programme to get through the remainder of the

half-year in this manner, and on the return of the party to Barstone, to tell everything to Mr. Locke. It had, thus far, answered tolerably well. Herbie had not again incurred Mr. Manson's censure, and had even contrived to satisfy Parsons, so far, at least, that the latter had no pretext for ill-using him. Charlie's usual practice had been to do the theme or the verses upstairs, and then bring them down for Herbie to copy. One of these exercises, he well remembered, had been written on the back of a letter; and it was a fragment of this which Parsons had now put into his hand.

Locke ran hastily over in his own mind the probable consequences to Charlie, if he should tell Parsons that he had received the letter from him. In the first place, Charlie might himself be the author of the trick, of which Parsons had spoken. In that case, of course, Parsons's vengeance would alight immediately on him. But even if the trick had been the work of some one else, Poole (Herbie well knew) would never betray that person, and Parsons would wreak his anger upon him for refusing to disclose his name. No, he must keep Charlie's name altogether out of the matter. He crushed up the scrap of paper in his hand, and threw it into the hottest part of the fire.

"What do you mean by that, you young wretch?" exclaimed the monitor, starting up and catching him by the collar.

Locke made no answer.

"Come, I say, I don't think you know what you are doing. Do you remember what I said about paying off the author of the trick properly?"

"Yes," said Herbert, quietly.

"And yet you refuse to tell me from whom you got that paper, though it is plain you know. Do you deny that you know?"

"No," was the answer, uttered in a low but firm tone.

"You do know, but you won't say; is that it?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then, of course you take the consequences upon yourself. If you choose to have a hall thrashing to-morrow, for intentionally screening the author of this trick, you can of course do so. But that will be your own doing. Now you may both go to bed."

Ives and Locke left the room; and Parsons, late as the hour was, went upstairs, and entered Empson's room.

He found the senior monitor in bed, but not asleep, and briefly related to him the whole occurrences of the evening, omitting, however, to notice the more awkward points of the story, such as the pelting with mud, and the loss of the hat and necktie. As he represented it, a deliberate attempt had been made to insult and injure him, though his readiness and resolution had averted the more serious consequences. He concluded by saying that he had pretty clear proof that it had been done by one of the juniors in the house.

"If so, I advise you to find him out, and give him a sound thrashing," said Empson.

"Just what I propose," returned Parsons. "I suppose you, as head of the house, would agree to his having a hall thrashing?"

"He deserves it, no doubt," assented Empson. "Who is the fellow?"

"That young beast, Locke."

"Locke! what, your little fag? You don't mean that he wrote the letter?" exclaimed Empson, a good deal startled.

"He knows who wrote it, and doesn't choose to tell. It's exactly the same thing."

"Not quite. You don't propose, do you, to give a hall thrashing to a little bit of a fellow like that?"

"He is not so very small," returned Parsons, with some asperity. "And it will be quite his own fault. If he chooses to say who did it he may get off."

"I really don't think I can agree to such a thing as that," exclaimed Empson. "He is too young and too weak."

"I am not going to be crossed in this matter, Empson. I will have it so."

"Will?"

"Yes, will. You may refuse if you like; but, if you do, you know the consequences."

Empson's cheek grew red with anger. He seemed on the point of bursting out into an indignant defiance. But he checked himself, and answered:

"I suppose you must have your way. But you don't, I suppose, ask *me* to thrash this little fellow? I will endure anything rather than that."

"No," said Parsons, "I am quite willing to thrash him myself. Now, good night."

CHAPTER XIX.

AFTER dinner on the following day, No. 14 was completely crowded by a number of Fourth and Fifth Form boys, who had come together partly at the invitation of Poole and Oliver, and partly at the request of Hutton. Very strange rumours had been in circulation all the morning. Ives had spread a report that Empson was going to administer a hall thrashing to Locke after dinner that day. "A hall thrashing," it may here be remarked, was nearly the same thing as a school thrashing, but with the difference that it took place in the hall of one of the boarding-houses instead of in the school-room, and was in general not quite so severe. The offence for which Locke was to be thrashed was said to be some impertinence practised by him upon Parsons; but what this was, no one knew.

These rumours reached Hutton's ears soon after breakfast, and he had had some talk with Locke on the subject immediately after morning school. Then there came another rumour that Hutton was going to appeal against the thrashing, and then another that Empson had forbidden it, but that Parsons meant to set his prohibition at nought, and to thrash Locke himself. It was with a good deal of interest that the boys met in the dining-hall that day. Parsons was there, with a formidable whalebone resting against his chair, but the party for whose benefit it was supposed to be intended, young Locke, was not present. This fact apparently became

known to Parsons about the middle of dinner, and did not improve his already irritated temper. Towards the end of dinner, written notices were passed down the two tables occupied by the juniors, requesting them to meet in No. 14, as soon as grace had been said.

Poole and Oliver knew very little more than the other boys about what had been going on. They had started immediately after school was up for a sharp run to Lyndford and back, and did not return till just before dinner. Hutton had come up to speak to them while they were getting ready. But the bell had already rung, and there was no time for anything but a very hurried explanation; but they had agreed with Hutton that a meeting should be held in their room as soon as dinner was over, to take the whole matter into consideration.

The room was now so crowded that the boys had hardly space to move. Out of the sixty belonging to the boarding-house more than forty were present. The three monitors of course were not there, nor those belonging to the two junior forms, nor again Gabbett, and one or two more belonging to his set. But with these exceptions, all the house had obeyed the summons. Hutton sat at the table, with Bennett and Lister on either side of him. Harry Oliver, looking furiously indignant, was leaning against the mantelpiece, a curious contrast to Charlie Poole, who stood behind Hutton's chair with the coldest and sternest expression on his face. Jack Wilkie and Burnet too were standing behind the Fifth Form boys' chairs, their flushed faces showing that they also were a good deal excited. The general expression on the others

was curiosity and wonder. As soon as they had all met, the door was fastened, and then Bennett, who was the senior Fifth Form boy present, asked Hutton to give some explanation of the summons which they had received.

"Well," began Hutton, "I think the best thing will be for me just to tell you what has happened, and then you can judge for yourselves, whether something ought to be done or not. You know young Locke sleeps in my room, and he has been for the last three months or so Parsons's fag. I am not inclined in general to make a fuss about juniors being overworked and hardly used, and that sort of thing; but I'll declare that the treatment Herbie Locke has had has been so abominable, that I can't hold my tongue about it. If Parsons hadn't been a monitor, either I should have given him, or he me, a pretty sharp thrashing long before this. The fellow is a beastly and disgusting bully; and I don't care who tells him that I said so."

A murmur of applause, and "Bravo, Daddy!" ran round the room.

"The poor little beggar," resumed Hutton, "as good-tempered and harmless a little chap as ever I saw, has been worked like a galley slave and thrashed like a nigger all the half. I don't believe he has deserved one licking where he has had fifty; and, what's more, he has never once turned sulky under the bullying that he has had. Last night Parsons dined out somewhere in the town, and came home after Locke had gone to bed. But a little after ten, Parsons called Locke into his room, and he was there I suppose a quarter of an hour. Locke came back and went to bed. He

didn't make any complaint. He never does complain of anything. But I heard young Ives asking him this morning what Parsons was going to thrash him for, and whether he knew what a hall thrashing was like? That was just as we were going into school. As soon as we came out, I made him tell me all about it. It seems that some one played off a trick upon Parsons yesterday——"

"What was the trick?" asked Lister.

"I fancy an anonymous letter was sent him, intending some impudence."

"Does he think that Locke wrote it?" inquired Bennett.

"I believe not," said Hutton. "Anyhow, Locke denied most distinctly knowing anything about it."

"Then what——" began Oliver, impetuously.

"What does he want to thrash Locke for? you would ask," continued Hutton. "He declares that Locke has a paper in his possession, the handwriting of which is the same as that of the anonymous letter. Locke won't tell him where he got the paper from."

"Why won't he tell him?" inquired Pratt.

"Why not?" burst out Oliver; "anybody may guess easily enough why not—because he does not choose to hand over some unfortunate fellow or other to be half killed by that brute Parsons. Parsons has no right to make any such demand of him at all."

"That is my own opinion," said Hutton. "Locke has denied knowing anything about the letter or the handwriting, and that ought to be enough."

"Well, go on, Daddy," said Lister, observing that Hutton

paused; "I want to know how it was that Locke wasn't thrashed to-day; what has become of him, in fact?"

"Well, that was my doing," said Hutton. "As soon as I had heard Locke's story, I went to Armstrong, and asked him to prevent the thrashing. Armstrong promised to speak to Empson; but Empson was out, and wouldn't be home till dinner, and then it might be too late. So, at my suggestion, he sent Locke down to Ferris's boat-house to fetch his boating things, which have never been brought away. Locke has only just come back now, and is getting some dinner, which has been kept for him in Armstrong's room."

"Bravo, Armstrong!" said Lister; "but I am afraid he won't succeed in persuading Empson to stop it. Parsons orders him about just as he likes."

"You 're right," said Hutton. "Armstrong told me that, though he would speak to Empson, he knew it would be useless."

There was a general cry of disgust.

"What is to be done, then?" said Wilkie. "I suppose you don't mean to allow Locke to be thrashed without trying to prevent it?"

"No, no," was the response, "anything before that."

"If you are really determined," said Poole, stepping forward, "we can prevent it easily enough."

"How?" asked Pratt.

"Parsons is one fellow; we are thirty or forty. If he attempts to thrash Locke, let us thrash him instead."

"Hurrah!" shouted Oliver, and a chorus of voices joined in the cheer.

"Stop a moment," said Bennett. "I am as much disgusted as you are, and if there is no other way of preventing it, may consent; but thrashing a monitor is a more serious matter than you seem to be aware of. A fellow is liable to be expelled, perhaps, for doing it."

"A single fellow, perhaps," said Poole, "but surely not the whole house. For my part, I can't believe that any one —monitors or masters—would blame us for preventing a monstrous piece of bullying like this, or for punishing it either; and if they were to expel me for doing it, I should glory in being expelled for such a reason."

"Quite right, quite right!" again burst out a dozen voices, among which Oliver was conspicuous. "Poole for ever!"

"But, as I was saying before," continued Poole, "it is quite impossible that any head master could expel the whole house."

"What do you propose to do, then?" asked Hutton.

"I propose that we each of us take down one or two heavy books when we go to supper," said Poole, "and the moment Parsons begins to thrash Locke, let fly straight at him."

"I second the proposal," said Burnet; "but I think I can improve upon it. What the monitors will try to do, will be to make out that some one was the ringleader, and come down upon him. Now, I will get near the gas-lamp, and as soon as I see Parsons raise his arm I'll turn it out, so that it will be impossible for any one to say who threw the first book."

"Well, I don't object to it as a last resource," said Hutton. "I have pretty well made up my mind that this shall be stopped somehow or other. But I think we ought to try one

thing first, and that is a round robin to Parsons, asking him not to thrash Locke."

"It would be no kind of good," said Wilkie; "he wouldn't pay the least heed to us if we went down on our knees to him."

"Very likely not," said Bennett; "but still it will put him very much more in the wrong. What do you say, Poole?"

"I am not inclined, I must say, to make any petition to Parsons," said Poole; "but I don't wish to go against the others. You had better put it to the vote."

"Very good," said Hutton. "What I have to propose is, that we draw up and sign a round robin, asking Parsons to let Locke off, and if he refuses, that we pelt him as Poole suggests. Is that right?"

"All right," said Bennett; "I'll put it to the vote."

Every hand in the room was held up for the resolution, and the leaders proceeded at once to put it into execution, as there was no time to spare. Hutton and Bennett wrote a sentence or two expressing the general wish, to which the others added their signatures. Then it was entrusted to Jem Watt, with orders to deliver it into Mr. Parsons's hands without delay. After this the conclave dispersed, Poole having first reminded all present of the necessity of going down to supper ready armed with books, in event of Parsons's rejecting the prayer of the round robin.

"What do you think of it, Dumbie?" asked Burnet of his quondam room-fellow, as they prepared that evening to go down to supper. "Are you going to take a book?"

"'Hederic,'" answered Dyke, putting a large quarto under his arm.

The attendance at supper that evening considerably astonished Jem Watt, who had never had such a demand for bread and cheese and swipes any day that half-year. The boys, it should be explained, were not obliged to attend at supper unless they liked, and it very often happened that they had made so substantial a meal at tea, as to require nothing further, or possessed delicacies of their own, which threw into the shade the humbler fare provided by Mr. Marsh. But though the attendance was large, there was much less noise than usual. The meal was enlivened by none of the chaff which was its ordinary accompaniment. The boys conversed together in low earnest tones, scarcely above a whisper, glancing every now and then at the monitors' table; which at supper was placed in one corner of the room, and where Empson, Armstrong, and Parsons were seated, as much preoccupied and uncomfortable, apparently, as themselves.

The meal at length came to a conclusion; the knives and plates were removed by the house servant, and the small monitors' table carried off. The removal of the latter was usually the signal for a general rush from the hall; but on the present occasion no one moved until Parsons, rising, took up the long whalebone which had been resting against his chair, and called for Herbert Locke.

"I have had a paper given me, which I believe some of you have sent," he added, looking round him. "All the answer I have to make is, that I think you had better mind your own business. Now then, Locke, come here."

"Stop a moment," said Armstrong. "Parsons, you have refused to listen to the request which, I learn, all the juniors

of the house have made of you, on the ground that this matter is no business of theirs; but that does not apply to the monitors. It is true that Empson alone has the power of preventing you, but if anything goes wrong, Formby and Marsh will blame all three of us. I ask you then, as a personal favour, not to thrash this boy. If any trick has been played on you, he declares most positively that he knows nothing about it."

Parsons waited until Armstrong had finished speaking, and then answered, briefly and coldly, "I intend to thrash Locke."

"Then, Empson, I once more call upon you to rouse up your pluck, and forbid this. Just look at that little fellow, and say whether he is a subject for a hall thrashing."

Empson looked uncomfortable. He was not without feeling, and besides, if a serious row ensued from this thrashing, he would incur more or less blame.

"Hadn't you better give him a sharp box on the ear or so, and let him go?" he whispered to Parsons.

"I shall not be satisfied with anything of the kind," returned the other, angrily.

"How many cuts do you mean to give him?" asked Empson, uneasily.

"Just as many as I choose. You had better be careful, Empson, lest you get yourself into as bad a scrape as young Locke here. I am not going to be ordered about by you, and you know a very good reason why you had better not try it on with me."

Empson said no more; he felt the awkwardness as well as the humiliation of his position, and endeavoured to escape

from it by leaving the room. With a hearty expression of contempt and disgust, Armstrong did the same; but he paused a minute at the door to say, "I warn you, Parsons, if this little fellow is seriously hurt, I will take up the matter in a manner which you will find very uncomfortable."

There was a dead silence in the room as the door slammed to behind Armstrong. Even Parsons, for the moment, seemed embarrassed, but he quickly recovered from it. His rage, in fact, was only increased by the demeanour of his brother monitors. Seizing Locke, who had been standing in the middle of the room for some minutes as pale as ashes, but calm and resolute, he grasped his whalebone, and let fall the first heavy blow on his victim's back. He raised his hand to repeat the blow, but it did not fall. As soon as he perceived that Armstrong's mediation would be offered in vain, Burnet had moved up to the gas-lamp, which was placed against the wall, and had kept his fingers on the tap, awaiting the proper moment. He had no sooner heard the sound of Parsons's cane than he turned the tap round, leaving the hall in total darkness, except for the glimmer of the expiring fire. This gave just light enough to show where Parsons's figure was standing, and enabled the boys to take their aim. It was fortunate, perhaps, for the success of Poole's scheme, that the dialogue with Armstrong had passed, rousing the general disgust and indignation to the utmost. At least twenty books, most of them heavy dictionaries, flew at the same moment from all parts of the hall, very few of which missed their aim. Half a dozen at least struck Parsons on the head, among which Dyke's "Hederic"

("head-a-break," Wilkie always called it afterwards) was not the least efficient. Parsons dropped his whalebone, and staggered under the unexpected salute. The next moment a second discharge, consisting of more numerous missiles and still better aimed, brought him to the ground insensible and seriously bruised. The boys gave a Red Indian-like whoop of victory, and then evacuated the room by one door, just as Jem Watt, who had been alarmed in the kitchen below by the crash of the falling books, entered it by the other.

"Hallo! what's the matter now?" exclaimed that functionary, as he found himself involved in almost total darkness, and stumbling over the books with which the floor was strewn. "Who is this?" he continued, as his foot came in contact with a prostrate figure, from which there came no answer to his question.

"It's Mr. Parsons," said a voice out of the darkness. "The fellows have been pelting him with books, and then cut for it. You had best re-light the gas, and then we shall see whether he is much hurt."

"That's Mr. Gabbett's voice," said James, "if I don't mistake—isn't it?"

"Yes," said Gabbett, "I saw all that passed, but I didn't run off with the rest. Have you got a match?"

"No, sir, but I'll go and fetch a light from the kitchen."

Jem soon re-appeared with a tallow candle, by the help of which he re-lighted the gas; and then the two between them lifting the fallen monitor, laid him on a bench, and proceeded to examine his hurts. These were found to be

very considerable. His head was cut in several places by the sharp corners of the books, and was covered with large bruises. His shoulders and back, too, had evidently sustained considerable damage.

"I say, sir, he've cotched it pretty heavy," remarked Watt, as these facts revealed themselves. "Hadn't I better go and fetch Mr. Marsh or Mrs. Wilson? Judge they'll send for Mr. Milford at once."

"Fetch Mother Wilson if you like, but not Marsh. Or, stay, go up to Mr. Empson, and tell him what has happened. We can carry Mr. Parsons up between us to his room, and then settle what's next to be done."

Jem Watt obeyed, and in a minute or two returned, accompanied not only by Empson, but by Armstrong also.

"Gabbett is right," said Empson, as soon as he caught sight of Parsons's face. "This is a matter for the monitors, not for the masters. Get him up into his room the first thing, and send for Milford."

The others concurring, they lifted Parsons between them, and conveying him upstairs, consigned him to his bed. Presently Mr. Milford arrived, and, to the great relief of the boys, declared that, beyond some heavy contusions, he had sustained no injury. He must remain in bed and be kept quiet for a day or two, and then he would be all right again. To Empson's request that he would make no mention of the matter to the head master or Mr. Marsh, he replied that "he should return Parsons as being on the sick list, of course, and it would be necessary for him to keep his room for some days; but he knew nothing of the circumstances

under which he had sustained the injuries, and did not think it necessary to inquire."

Having delivered himself of this diplomatic reply, which his long experience of Westonbury had taught him was the wisest he could pursue, old Milford took his departure, and the monitors began to consider what course it was incumbent upon them to take.

"You were present, I believe, Gabbett?" said Empson. "Tell me again exactly what happened after Armstrong and myself had left the hall."

"Parsons collared Locke," said Gabbett, "and gave him one cut; but the next minute the gas was turned off, and a whole lot of fellows shied books at Parsons's head. He was cut off his legs, and then they all made a bolt of it."

"You didn't see who turned off the gas?" asked Empson.

"No, the lamp was behind my back. I was looking at Parsons and Locke."

"Could you see whether any fellows from the Fifth Form table threw, or was it only the juniors?" inquired Armstrong.

"They must have done so," said Gabbett. "I couldn't see any one in particular, but the books flew from all parts of the hall. It 's all because that young Locke is such a favourite. They 're determined he shan't be hurt."

"And I 'm determined he shall," said Parsons, who had gradually recovered from his stupor while his brother monitors were talking. "Gabbett is right. All this has been caused by that young Locke and his two accomplices, Poole and Oliver. They 've played this trick between them, and put up the other fellows to this last business. Empson, of

course you 'll bring this matter before the council to-morrow, and they 'll inquire into it. They mayn't be able to bring the thing home to Poole and Oliver more than the others, but Locke is certainly at the bottom of it."

"Oh, yes, I 'll bring it before the council, if you like," said Empson, glad to be saved further trouble and responsibility.

"It is not a matter for the council," said Armstrong. "This has all happened in Marsh's house, and what passes in the boarding-houses concerns the monitors of those houses only."

"The council itself will be the fittest body to determine whether it is a matter for them or not. I wish to be left alone now, if you please; but before you go into school to-morrow, Empson, I should like to say a word or two to you."

CHAPTER XX.

THERE was great excitement in the school on the following morning. The boys belonging to Marsh's boarding-house held their tongues most pertinaciously on the subject of the disturbance which had taken place on the previous evening. They were like guests at a feast, who had been hurried on by excitement to indulge themselves in more than was good for them, and who were suffering for their indiscretion next day. The consequences of what had taken place might be more serious than any of them had expected. Jem Watt went about the house looking extremely grave and important, but freely expressing his opinion to anybody who asked it, or rather to every one who could be got to listen to it; and his opinion, when given, was not of a particularly cheering character. "Them among you as shied them big books at the poor gent's head is as like as not to be had up for murder, that's my opinion. Dr. Milford—he was a precious long time in the room, and he looked as grave as my lord judge with the black cap on, when he went away. I think I heard him say as there might be discussion of the brain."

The boys looked very blank at one another as they heard this speech. To be sure Jem was notorious for drawing the long bow; but still there was no doubt that the school doctor had been sent for, and that Parsons was still in bed;

and it was very likely that there would be, as they phrased it, an awful blow up. They comforted themselves somewhat with the old idea, which had been their *cheval de bataille* from the first in the affair—viz., that they couldn't punish fifty fellows very severely, and that no one could pick out any one of the fifty who was more prominent in the matter than the rest. If they didn't betray themselves, no one could very well get them into any scrape. Therefore the word was given to know nothing at all about the matter, and with this injunction they most faithfully complied.

The consequence of this was that the rest of the school, having no authentic information on the subject, proceeded, according to the ordinary custom of mankind, to supply the defects of history by legend and fable. Parsons's head was reported to have been broken by a blow from a poker, or, according to others, a cricket-bat. There had been a fight between him and Armstrong, and while the two were struggling together a dozen fellows had struck Parsons from behind. All agreed that he was dangerously hurt. The most moderate reported that brain-fever had set in, and, even if he got through it, he would not be well for months. Others affirmed that he was not expected to outlive the day, and others again that he had already expired a little after daybreak that morning, and that the shutters of his room were in consequence closed. A few even insisted upon it that the sergeant of police or the coroner (they did not exactly know which) had been down an hour before, to arrange about the inquest.

More correct information had been conveyed to the

monitors by Empson immediately after early chapel, together with his intention to bring the matter before the council. It was usual, where matters were not of very pressing importance, to wait for one of the ordinary meetings; but in the present instance it was thought that there ought to be no delay, and a summons was sent to the five head boys to meet in the head monitor's room immediately after morning school. Armstrong, as one of the monitors belonging to Marsh's, claimed, and was allowed, to be present, though he, of course, would have no vote in any division which might take place.

The reader has already been informed that the five members of the council were Meyler himself, Holloway, Empson, Daly, and Benham; but the last-named had left within the last few days, and his place had been supplied by Hyde—a change not likely to be favourable to the juniors in the present business.

Meyler took his place in his arm-chair with a graver face than he usually exhibited. As the reader knows, he hated trouble, and would always shunt aside any difficulties which might arise, if he could, as shortly and speedily as possible; but in the present instance he knew the matter in hand could not be thus disposed of. An attempt to thrash a monitor was a thing that had not been heard of at Westonbury in the memory of any one there; and here it had not only been attempted, but carried out, and that apparently with very complete success. The Sixth would in all likelihood insist upon the outbreak being very seriously punished. Meyler did not much mind that; but then any very sharp

thrashing, especially on a large scale, administered to the juniors, would be almost certain to reach the head master's ears, and cause an inquiry; and though he very likely would come out of that all right, still the whole thing would be a terrible nuisance. There was, however, no help for it, the thing must be done, and the sooner it was got over the better.

"Now then, Empson," he began, "let us have a full account of this business. I suppose you know all about it, don't you?"

"I believe I do," said Empson. He then proceeded to relate the facts with which the reader is already acquainted.

He was listened to in silence. Armstrong was then asked whether he could supply any more information. He replied by mentioning the fact of the round robin, and his own personal request to Parsons, both of which had been omitted by Empson.

"Very well," said Meyler. "Then now that we have the whole matter before us, I shall be glad if any one will give his opinion as to what ought to be done."

Hyde was the first to speak.

"There can be no conceivable doubt, I suppose, that the fellows who did this must receive as sharp a thrashing as we can give them. A school thrashing before twelve is the only possible resolution we can arrive at. The present question for us is who is to have it."

"I beg your pardon, Hyde," said Armstrong. "There is another question to be considered before that, and that is whether this is a matter for the council at all. The whole thing—the hoax, whatever it may have been, the threatened

thrashing, and the attack on Parsons, took place inside Marsh's boarding-house. Therefore, according to the rules of the school, the matter is one with which the monitors of Marsh's boarding-house alone are concerned."

"I dare say!" exclaimed Hyde, angrily. "You want, in fact, to get these fellows off altogether. In my opinion it is chiefly your doing that this took place at all. If you hadn't encouraged them in their impudence, as it is plain you did, they would in all likelihood have never ventured on such measures; and now you want to have the thing left in your own hands, in order that you may let them off easy. But I don't think the council will agree to that."

"Armstrong has quite a right to propose that view of the matter," observed Daly, interposing to prevent an angry answer from the boy named; "but I think he forgets that it is Empson, the head of Marsh's, who has brought this matter before us. No doubt, as an ordinary rule, whatever goes on inside the boarding-houses is no concern of the school generally; but when it comes to thrashing monitors, it is time for us to interfere."

"We had better put it to the vote," said Meyler, "whether we will take notice of this matter or not."

This accordingly was done, when the motion was carried *nem. con.* — Daly, Empson, and Hyde voting for it, and Holloway declining to vote.

"That is settled, then," said Meyler. "Now we come to Hyde's suggestion, that the offenders, all or some, have a school thrashing. About that, I suppose there can't be much doubt. If we are to deal with it at all, it must be in

that way. If a fellow is not to have a school thrashing for pitching into a monitor and half killing him, I don't know what he ought to have a school thrashing for."

"Of course, of course," said Daly; "the only question is who are to be thrashed."

"The whole house ought to be thrashed, that's my opinion," said Hyde.

"The whole house!" repeated Daly. "That *is* coming it strong! Who is to do it?"

"We might all lend a helping hand," said Hyde. "But anyhow we could make them all draw lots, and every fifth fellow, say, should have a thrashing. I am sure I would very willingly do my part, if I was wanted."

"I make no doubt of it," said Meyler; "but, in the first place, such a proceeding would certainly reach Formby's ears, and there would be a bothering inquiry, and probably a row. And, in the second place, it would be a deal too much trouble."

"The ringleaders are the ones to be thrashed," observed Benham. "There must have been ringleaders."

"No doubt there were," said Meyler. "The question is how are we to get at them. You ought to be able to tell us that, Empson."

"I don't know, and that's the truth," said Empson. "But I think we had better send for Gabbett; if anybody knows about it, it is he."

Gabbett, who had been waiting about in accordance with Empson's directions, was introduced accordingly, and he at once declared the ringleaders to be Poole and Oliver.

"Why do you single them out?" inquired Armstrong.

"Well, in the first place, they have been backing up young Locke against Parsons all the half," said Gabbett. "Poole was for ever down in his room, telling him not to mind, and all that sort of thing. Then the meeting at which the row was got up was held in Poole's room; and he and Oliver, I know, went about asking fellows to go to it. I heard him do that myself."

"Weren't those the two fellows that Parsons had up for the trespass on the Rocky Island a short time ago?" inquired Meyler.

"Yes, to be sure," said Empson, "and the same with whom there was that row about Sykes last half. They are about the two most coxy young juniors in the school."

"And you say that they got up the meeting at which this attack on Parsons was concerted, and that it was held in their room?" said Meyler.

"Yes, to be sure," said Empson.

"Well, then, no doubt they deserve to get it hot and sharp. Does anybody question that? If nobody does, the matter may be considered settled."

"I should like to say a word or two before that is resolved on," said Holloway. "I have been carefully considering the matter, and must say, in the first place, that Parsons had no right to thrash Locke. Whatever trick may have been played upon him, it appears to be admitted Locke had nothing to do with it. All that is charged against him is that he wouldn't say from whom he got a particular letter, and no one had any right to make him say——"

"Very likely," broke in Daly, impatiently. "Parsons may have been hasty there; but I suppose you don't mean to say that justifies juniors in making an assault of this kind on a monitor, and half killing him?"

"No; but it complicates the case, and makes it very difficult to deal with."

"Well, supposing it does, what then?"

"I think we had better leave it alone, or rather lay it before Formby."

"Lay it before Formby!" repeated Hyde, starting up. "You mean you really advise that? It is you, and fellows like you and Armstrong here, who encourage these young brutes in their impudence. Such things were never heard of in the times of our predecessors, and shan't be in mine, if I can help it. I suppose none of you," he continued, turning to the other monitors, "are inclined to support Holloway in this matter, are you?" Meyler, Daly, and Empson replied at once in the negative. "Very well, that's done with then, and I hope we shall hear no more about it. Gabbett, you can go, we have done with you."

"You will hear no more from me as regards reporting the thing to Formby," resumed Holloway, as the door closed behind the junior, "that is certain. If the majority is against me, that is enough. But if we are to deal with this matter, I shall, in the first place, propose that, supposing a school thrashing to be given to Oliver and Poole, Sykes shall not be the person to give it."

"Sykes not give it!" repeated Hyde in surprise. "Why not?"

"Because it is well known that he bears a bitter dislike—a hatred, I may say—towards these two fellows, and he ought not to be allowed to turn a thing of this sort into an opportunity of gratifying his own private dislike."

"What! a fellow is not to thrash any one he dislikes, then?" suggested Daly. "In that case, Parsons ought not to have attempted to thrash young Locke last night, because it is certain that he does not like him."

"I certainly think he ought not," responded Holloway.

"What gammon!" said Daly. "Then, if a junior cheeks me, and makes me very savage, I mustn't lick him for his impudence myself, but I must send for some one else to do it, hey?"

"Ridicule isn't argument," said Holloway. "I think if a fellow is to be licked for insulting a monitor, it oughtn't to be by the monitor he has insulted."

"Have you anything else to suggest?" inquired Meyler, sarcastically.

"Yes," said Holloway, calmly. "I think we ought to put a limit on the number of cuts that the manager, or a monitor either, is allowed to give a fellow. It oughtn't to be left to him to give any number he likes. Indeed, I should think he would be glad to have it settled for him."

"There you go again with your humbug," burst out Hyde. "I am sick of all this rubbish. I should like to know what sort of time we should have of it, if things went on according to your fancy. A junior is cheeky, and won't do what a monitor tells him, and the monitor is not to give it him hot and sharp, after the old fashion, but he is to get a lot of

other monitors to sit upon him, and decide whether he deserves to be licked or not. And when that has been settled, then they are to determine the exact amount of licking he is to get—three cuts for dawdling over a message, five for forgetting it altogether, two cuts for over-browning your toast, four for a coxy answer, ten for shouting some impudence after you, twenty for shying a stone at you! We had better get Formby to draw up a regular tariff, and paint it up against the school-room walls. There is only one way of dealing with juniors — thrash them a little when they are impudent, and they will do it twice as much; thrash them well, and they won't do it again. Look here, Meyler, we have had pretty well enough of this. To bring it to an end, I propose that these two fellows—Poole and Oliver their names are, I believe—are thrashed by Sykes in school before twelve to-morrow. If he lays it into them with a will, all the better."

No one spoke, and Meyler was about to comply with Hyde's suggestion, when Empson, suddenly recollecting himself, as it seemed, interrupted Meyler as he was beginning to speak.

"There is one thing I had forgotten," he said. "I agree in what Hyde has observed, but I think this young fellow, this Locke, who has been at the bottom of the whole row, oughtn't to be allowed to escape. You see, the main question at issue between Parsons and these fellows has been, whether Locke is to be thrashed or not. Parsons was determined that he should be, and they were determined he should not. Now, so far, they have carried their point,

and if he gets off to-morrow they will consider that they have got the best of it."

"They oughtn't to be allowed to do that, of course," said Daly. "Do you propose, then, that Locke shall have the school thrashing as well as these two?"

"Yes, that is my proposal," said Empson.

"Isn't he a very little fellow?" asked Holloway.

"Not so very," said Empson. "I have known as small fellows, I think, licked before now. Besides, Sykes, of course, needn't lick him so much."

"And you really mean that you are going to propose that, Empson!" burst in Armstrong, who had been endeavouring for some time past to control his indignation. "I know now what Parsons wanted you for this morning. I suspected it at the time, but I know it now. He hates this poor little fellow, whom he has bullied in such a manner that I have half a dozen times felt heartily ashamed of myself for not interfering to prevent it. You know yourself that it is disgusting and shameful bullying; but you have had your orders——"

"Orders!" repeated Hyde.

"Yes, orders, Hyde; and I wonder that for once even he is not ashamed to obey them. But I have done with this. If you are going to vote that this poor harmless little fellow is to be handed over to the mercies of that brute Sykes, I, at least, am not going to stop here and hear it." So saying, he stalked out of the study, and banged the door behind him.

"Young blood," said Meyler, coolly. "It is his first half-

year as a monitor. Well, now, I suppose we are agreed that Poole, Oliver, and Locke are to have a school thrashing before twelve to-morrow. Are we all in favour of that?"

Daly, Hyde, and Empson declared their assent; Holloway said nothing.

"That dog 's dead then," said Meyler, getting up. "Hyde, it is your business, as junior of the five, to warn Sykes to be in readiness before twelve to-morrow."

Empson returned to report to Parsons the success of his manœuvres, while Armstrong, thoroughly disgusted, went out for a solitary walk along the banks of the Lynde, which at this time of the year were quite deserted. Independently of the vexation and distress which the resolution just come to by the monitors had caused him, he was in great difficulty as to what he ought to do himself. He felt, beyond all doubt, that, whether Poole and Oliver deserved a thrashing or not, the decision just come to was monstrously unjust, as well as cruel, as regarded young Locke. Nothing was even alleged against him, but that he had refused to say from whom he had got a particular letter; indeed, if he chose even now to answer the question, there would not be a pretext for touching him. He felt half inclined to go home at once, send for Locke, and urge him at least to confide the truth to him. Probably the consequence would not be what Locke himself had feared; and, even if it should be otherwise, Locke might trust him to keep the secret. Most likely, he thought, the writer of this mischievous letter was Poole or Oliver, after all. If so, they could not be the worse off for the fact being known, as they were in any case to receive

the severest thrashing that could be inflicted on them. If it was neither Poole nor Oliver, the fellow, whoever he was, ought to own the matter rather than let Locke be thrashed; and Armstrong was resolved, if he learned his name from Locke, to send for him privately, and tell him so.

But then, suppose that Locke persisted in his silence, was Armstrong to stand by and allow him to be thrashed? Of course it might be said that he could do nothing more in the matter. He had appealed to Empson, and he had appealed to the council, and there was no one left to whom he could appeal, unless it was to the masters, Mr. Marsh or Dr. Formby.

"I suppose that would not do," he muttered to himself. "When Holloway proposed it, all the others exclaimed against it, and I am not sure that Sydenham himself wouldn't have said that it would be worse, in the long run, to introduce the practice of taking things up to the masters, than to allow of an occasional piece of injustice like this. I don't *know* that Arthur Sydenham would have said so, though. If there was one thing he hated more than another, it was the abuse of a monitor's power, and I think he would have gone most lengths rather than allow a piece of atrocious tyranny like this. Well, I 'll go home, and see Locke at once."

He was a long way from Westonbury when he came to this resolution, and the dusk was fast coming on. He stepped out, wishing to get home as quickly as possible. It wanted about a quarter of an hour of lock-up-time as he crossed the bridge over the Lynde, and there he ran right against Tom Rolles, a distant connection of his, as the reader knows, an

articled pupil of old Briggs's, who, report said, was shortly about to take him into partnership.

"Dick Armstrong, I declare!" exclaimed this worthy. "I have been to Marsh's to look after you, but no one knew where you were to be found. I say, I have got such a story for you about the late election. I find the fellows at Marsh's don't know the truth."

"I am pretty well tired of the election, Tom," said Armstrong, whose mind was too full of Herbert Locke to be interested in Tom Rolles's rather tedious anecdotes; "and I am afraid I can't stop now."

"Yes, but wait a moment. I have been down to get Marsh's leave for you to come and dine with us this evening. There is Corny Cobbe come to stay with us till to-morrow, and we want you to meet him."

Armstrong hesitated. He liked his cousin very well, though at the present moment he would rather have gone home; but he was sensible he had no sufficient excuse to allege.

"Has Marsh given leave?" he asked.

"Oh, yes; he made no bother," said Rolles. "And you had better come at once, Dick. Briggs dines rather early, you know, and doesn't like the dinner kept waiting. Never mind your dress; we are not particular about that."

Armstrong reflected that there would be still time to see Locke on the following morning before school, and, after all, he was not sorry to have something that would divert his thoughts for the present. "Very well, Tom," he said, slipping his arm within his cousin's, "I'll come. It will be great fun seeing Corny again."

CHAPTER XXI.

JUST about the time that Dick Armstrong had reached the farthest point of his walk, the occupants of No. 14 were again taking counsel, though this time only six persons were present—the three Barstone boys, Wilkie, Burnet, and Dyke. Information had been received of what had taken place at the monitors' meeting up to the time of Gabbett's departure—that worthy having proceeded to inform several fellows whom he encountered at Marsh's, that it was pretty well decided to give Poole and Oliver a school thrashing on the following day, together with his own commentary thereon —viz., that he hoped it would take the cheek out of them.

The report was not at first believed.

"What can they be going to thrash you two in particular for?" exclaimed Burnet. "There isn't a shadow of a pretext for picking you out, that I can see. They might just as well thrash Jack Wilkie or me."

"It is that brute Gabbett's doing," said Wilkie. "He has been going about telling fellows that you got up the meeting yesterday in our room, and that you first proposed booking Parsons."

"How could he know that?" asked Burnet. "So far as I can recollect, it is not true; but, anyway, Gabbett couldn't know it if it was."

"He doesn't much care whether it 's true or false," said

Poole; "nor do Parsons and Empson either, for the matter of that. They are determined to lick Harry and me, and if they don't find one excuse for doing it, they will soon find another."

"They don't care," repeated Oliver, "and I don't either. The brutes are welcome to lick me as much as they like. They can't undo the booking that Parsons has had, let them thrash away till Christmas."

"Oh, but, Charlie, Harry, I can't bear this," exclaimed Locke. "This is all on my account. I wish you had let Parsons lick me. It wouldn't have been half so bad as this. Oh, Jack, Burnet, can't this be prevented in any way?"

"I wish it could, I am sure," said Wilkie; "but unless Charlie and Harry choose to chivy for it, I don't know what can be done. I suppose you won't do that, Charlie?"

"Chivy! what! run away from a licking?" exclaimed Poole contemptuously. "No, I should think not, indeed. Let that brute Sykes lick away; I am not going to knock under to him. Don't look so unhappy about it, Herbie. Harry and I can stand worse things than that, and not think much of it."

Locke would have continued his remonstrances, but at this moment the door suddenly opened, and the person who had just been the subject of their remarks presented himself.

"Are young Poole and Oliver here?" asked Sykes. "Oh, yes, all right. Meyler desires that you two will wait after morning school to-morrow, to receive a school thrashing. I guess your friend Armstrong won't get you off this time," he added, with a malicious grin. He was about to leave the room

when his eye suddenly lighted upon Locke, who had been sitting on a stool half hidden by Burnet's figure. "Is that young Locke there?"

"Yes," said Herbert.

"I was just going to your room, but I may as well save myself the trouble. You too are to stop before twelve, along with Poole and Oliver."

"You don't mean to say Locke is to have a school thrashing!" exclaimed Poole, hastily.

"He is only trying to hoax us," suggested Wilkie.

"Am I, though!" said Sykes. "You will find it is no hoax to-morrow, when the time comes. Hyde came to me about half an hour ago, and told me it had been settled by four to one that Poole, Oliver, and Locke were to be thrashed to-morrow. Mind you are there at the right time, young 'un, and don't attempt to whine or shuffle, or it will only make matters worse." With these words he left the room.

"It is a shame," burst out Wilkie, as the door closed behind the manager. "It is bad enough thrashing Charlie and Harry, but this is not to be borne."

"It shan't be done," shouted Oliver. "I'll be cut into twenty pieces first."

"I wish we could prevent it, I am sure," said Burnet, despondently. "But what are we to do?"

"Do!" repeated Oliver. "Herbert shan't go. We'll barricade the door. I'll go and seize hold of Parsons's pistols. I'll shoot Sykes through the head, before I will allow him to do it," continued Oliver, who was almost beside himself with indignation.

"Shut up, Harry," said Poole. "It's no use talking in that way. I should like to know, Jem, if you have anything to advise."

"The only thing that I can think of," said Burnet, "is that Locke should put his name down on Mother Wilson's list. He can't be obliged to leave the boarding-house until it is taken off again. Well, then, do you write immediately to Locke's father, Charlie, and tell him all about this. He had better come up and take Herbie from the school altogether."

"That will be only anticipating what I have had in mind for a long time past," observed Poole. "If there were time to write and get an answer from Herbie's father, I should be quite contented. But it is a two days' post to Barstone, and I don't think Herbie will be allowed to stay in Mother Wilson's room till then."

"I am afraid he wouldn't be allowed to go there at all," observed Wilkie. "I think you fellows have forgotten that every junior, when he puts his name on Mother Wilson's list, is obliged to give notice to the head monitor of the house. Empson would be sure to suspect the dodge, and make inquiries. Then it would be found out that Locke wasn't really ill."

"I shouldn't like to say I was ill, when I was not," remarked Locke, quietly.

"Very well, then, Herbie, there is only one thing to be done," said Poole, who had now quite recovered his self-possession. "There is only one thing to be done, and I must insist on your doing it."

"I'll do anything you wish me, provided it is not wrong," said Herbert.

"It is not wrong at all. To-morrow morning, as soon as the doors are open, I shall go up with you to the 'Lyndford Arms,' and see you on to the top of the 'Highflyer.' You 'll get to Binford by five o'clock, and the landlord of the 'King's Arms' will send you on to Barstone in his gig. Then you can explain the whole matter to your father. I am quite sure he will think we have done what is right. Won't that do, Harry?"

"Capitally," said Oliver. "I wonder I didn't think of it. But then there is one thing. Have we money to pay his fare?"

"We 'll see what we have got," said Poole. "I can raise two half-crowns."

"I have four shillings," said Oliver. "What have you, Herbie?"

Locke emptied his purse, which contained three shillings. The other boys also contributed what money they had, and altogether between fifteen and sixteen shillings were produced.

"That's enough to pay the fare," said Poole. "We can promise Tom he shall have his tip next time, and you can take a lot of bread and cheese in your pocket to eat on the road. Well, that 's settled then; and now I don't mind anything else."

"Yes," said Oliver, "it will be grand to-morrow when that malicious brute Sykes calls for Herbie, and finds that he is safe out of his reach. His face will be something to see!"

"He 'll pay it off on you, the beast!" exclaimed Wilkie, incautiously.

"Let him," said Poole, contemptuously. "I don't care."

"Oh, but I do, Charlie," said Locke. "I haven't liked to say anything against your plan, and I know how kindly you mean it. But I really cannot consent to do this. All this has come through me. It was to save me from being thrashed that you got into this trouble, and are going to have this tremendous thrashing; and I am to get off altogether, and you are to get it twice as bad, because I get off. I can't do it, Charlie. I'd do pretty well anything you told me, except this. But I couldn't go home to-morrow on the top of the coach, and know that you were staying here to bear what, after all, ought to be my thrashing. It would break my heart, Charlie, and that's the truth."

"The young cove is right," said Burnet, giving Locke a slap of approval between the shoulders. "He can't go and leave you to be whopped."

"What is to be done, then?" exclaimed Oliver, despairingly.

"Why, you two must go along with him, that's what. I know you are plucky enough; but, after all, it isn't on your own account that you go; and just remember that it will be three times the sell for Parsons and Sykes to-morrow, if you and Poole are *non inventi*, which it would be if only Locke was missing."

"What do you say, Charlie?" asked Oliver.

"I don't like it," said Poole. "But I suppose it can't be helped. The one thing of which I am determined is that

Herbie shan't be thrashed, and if he won't go unless we go with him, go with him I suppose we must."

"But how about the money?" said Burnet. "You won't have above sixteen shillings between you three."

"No, that's a bore," said Poole. "But I tell you what. We can all three go up to-morrow and get on the coach, and tell Tom Brindley that we haven't our purses with us, but the money for our fares shall be sent next day. He knows us by this time well enough, and that his money is safe. The sixteen shillings we have will pay for our breakfasts and dinners, and the tips to the coachman and porters."

"Tom will smell a rat," observed Burnet. "He'll think —what is pretty near the fact—that you three are going to cut your luckies."

"Never mind if he does," said Poole. "He is not *obliged*, mind you, to know anything of the kind, and he is too good-natured to make a bother. Indeed, as we are all going to our own homes, he couldn't be blamed."

"Well, that's not unlikely," assented Wilkie, "and it's lucky that the 'Highflyer' starts so early that you will be well out of the place, and miles away, before any inquiry can be made."

"Yes, it is a good job in one way that the 'Highflyer' starts early," said Burnet, "but not in another. You fellows ought to be clear of the house by half-past six, or a quarter to seven at the very latest. But the house door is sometimes not unlocked till two or three minutes before chapel."

"That's a nuisance certainly," said Poole. "I suppose we couldn't get out of the window?"

"There is no window on the ground floor that isn't barred," said Wilkie, "unless it is Marsh's own rooms, and I suppose you wouldn't like to run the risk of going into them."

"No, that wouldn't do, exactly," said Oliver. "But I think you are mistaken about the door not being opened. There is the early post comes at half-past six. I have often heard the knock."

"Ay, the knock," said Burnet—"that's at half-past six, or thereabouts. But the door isn't opened then, unless there is a letter to be paid for. The letters are simply slipped into the box, and Jem takes them out when he comes to unlock the door for chapel."

"Well, then, that will be easily managed," said Wilkie. "We must put a letter into the post directed to some one in the house, without paying for it, and then the door will be unlocked all right. Here," he continued, taking up the French Exercise which he had just received back from Monsieur Pierrot, "put that into an envelope, and send it to somebody—to you Burnet, hey?"

"Thank you," said Burnet, "I don't see why I am to pay twopence; and besides, my French doesn't require correction. Send it to Mother Wilson. She can only speak a few words of French, and I dare say it will do her good."

"I have no objection," said Wilkie; and disguising his hand as much as possible, he addressed the exercise to "Mrs. Wilson, Rev. T. Marsh's, Westonbury College." There was just time to run round, and slip it into the nearest post-office, before the hour of locking up.

It wanted about a quarter to seven on the following morn-

ing, when the door of No. 14 was hurriedly opened, and Armstrong entered. He glanced quickly round the room. Two of the beds were empty, though it was plain they had been slept in. The occupants of the other two were buried in a slumber, apparently so sound, that it was with difficulty the monitor could rouse them. Armstrong, however, was evidently in no mood to be trifled with. He stepped up to Wilkie's bed and shook him roughly. "I want Poole and Oliver," he said. "Are they here? If not, what has become of them? None of your gammon," he continued, as Wilkie began to yawn and stretch himself, as though only just roused from profound sleep. "I must know where they are. Locke's bed is empty also, and Hutton doesn't know what is become of him. You must tell me where they are. There is no time to be lost."

Wilkie sat up in his bed and looked hard at Armstrong.

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Armstrong, answering the junior's look, "I don't want them for any harm—just the contrary. If I can see them before school, this business may be put right, at all events so far as Locke is concerned."

"Well, Armstrong, to tell you the truth," said Wilkie, "all three of them are gone."

"Gone!" repeated Armstrong, "gone where?"

Wilkie again hesitated. "Gone—away from Westonbury," he said.

"Don't be a fool," exclaimed Armstrong. "I must know where they are gone to. You may trust me at all events, I think."

"Well, they have gone to Barstone in E——shire, where their friends live, if you must know."

"Barstone! E——shire!" repeated Armstrong—"why, that's pretty nearly a hundred miles off, isn't it? And they haven't been gone very long," he added, glancing at the tumbled bed-clothes. "They can be hardly out of Westonbury yet. How did they mean to go?"

"By the 'Highflyer,'" said Wilkie. "That goes within a few miles of Barstone."

"The 'Highflyer.' That doesn't leave the High Street till seven o'clock, unless I mistake."

"No, punctually at seven," said Wilkie.

"Then there may be time to catch them. It wants several minutes of seven yet. Hallo, Jem!" he shouted, "put on your hat, and run up with me to the High Street."

Jem Watt obeyed without demur, Armstrong being one of the few persons for whom he entertained an unquestioning reverence.

They made the best of their way through the narrow alleys which intervened between Marsh's house and the High Street, and reached the "Lyndford Arms" just as the cathedral clock was on the stroke of seven. The ostlers were ready with the horses, which were to replace those which had come from Brandleigh, and one or two passengers with their luggage were hanging about the door of the inn. But there was no appearance of the boys of whom Armstrong was in search, and the bookkeeper and porters being questioned on the subject, declared they had seen nothing of them. Armstrong and Jem hung about the street, thinking that they might yet make their appearance. But the "Highflyer" came up, the horses were changed, and the

coach drove off again, and nothing was seen of any one of the three. Armstrong returned to Marsh's at a quarter-past seven, inclined to be extremely angry at the cheat which, as he supposed, had been practised on him. He inquired for Empson, and finding that he was in Parsons's room, went up there to speak to him. He had hardly entered when the party were joined by Meyler and Daly. Jem Watt, who was a most inveterate gossip, had lost no time in spreading the story of the boys' flight. It had flown like wildfire through the school, and, amongst others, had reached the ears of some of the head monitors, who had straightway come down to ascertain what truth there might be in the rumour.

Empson, however, was not among those who had learned anything about it. He had received a message from Parsons before chapel, requesting that he would go to him immediately after the end of the service, and he had complied. He found Parsons very fidgety about the school thrashing which was to take place in the middle of the day. He had learned that Armstrong was exerting himself to prevent it, if possible, and wished to make certain that there was no hitch in the machinery. Empson was doing his best to quiet him, assuring him that it was impossible that any one of the three could get out of it now, when Armstrong entered, followed almost immediately afterwards by the other monitors, and gave him the startling information that all three boys had disappeared, and had gone—no one could say whither.

"Gone—cut and run! you don't mean that, to be sure," said Meyler, coolly. "There will be a proper row about that!"

"I am afraid there will," said Armstrong, "and I fear I am in some degree to blame for it. If I had only gone to these fellows when I came home last night, instead of waiting till this morning, I could have prevented it all."

"Well, I don't see how you could have done that, Armstrong," said Meyler. "These young beggars have cut for it, I suppose, because they had no mind to be whopped. I don't know what your powers of persuasion may be; but I can scarcely think you could have persuaded them to stay for it."

"I could have shown that there was no sufficient ground for thrashing Poole and Oliver," said Armstrong, "and not a shadow of a pretext for thrashing Locke."

"That 's the old story," said Parsons impatiently, from his bed.

"No, Parsons, the story I have to tell is altogether new," said Armstrong, "and as it must all come out now, I suppose I may as well tell it. I went out to dine yesterday with Mr. Briggs, and there I met my cousin, Cobbe, who was in this boarding-house, and left at the end of last half. He was the author of the hoax played off upon you, Parsons, about which there has been all this fuss—he and his cousin, Rolles."

"Hoax," said Meyler, "well, I 've heard something about a hoax, but no one knows exactly what it was."

"I can tell you," said Armstrong. "Cobbe heard, partly from Tom Rolles, and partly from some of the fellows here, that Parsons fancied Lord Lyndford to have been greatly taken with his appearance and address on the day of the nomination——"

"If you are going to make remarks personally uncivil to me," interposed Parsons, "I must trouble you, if you please, to get out of my room. Empson, I think you might interfere, and say, out of Marsh's house also."

"What am I to do?" said Empson, who was quite as curious as any of the others. "Everything must come out now."

"Very good," said Parsons, vindictively. "Then, mind you, everything *shall* come out."

"Go on," said Meyler, too full of curiosity to heed this by-play, "tell us what the hoax was."

Parsons would have got up to leave the room himself, only he was undressed and in bed, and moreover hardly able to walk. He saw they would not mind anything that he said, so he was obliged to lie still and hear it all.

"Well," resumed Armstrong, "Cobbe was always full of mischief, and he took it into his head to write a note of invitation to one of the head monitors to be present at a public dinner given in honour of Lord Lyndford, and sent it to Parsons, as though by Lord Lyndford's special request. Parsons got leave from Marsh to go—that is, leave to dine with a gentleman, he didn't say whom——"

"Was the invitation to one of the *head* monitors?" repeated Daly.

"The letter didn't say one of the head monitors," interposed Parsons.

"Cobbe and Rolles say that it did," pursued Armstrong. "But that's of no consequence. The invitation was written in the name of a fellow called Lee, who was one of Simcox's

election agents, and who was at that time engaged in an inquiry into the late election, to try whether he couldn't make out some cases of bribery against the Blues. Parsons went down there and got mobbed by the Yellows. Rolles gave a very vivid description of the scene, which, I believe, he himself witnessed. Parsons had to cut it like mad; he was pelted with mud, his hat and cloak and necktie were torn off, and he had a narrow escape of being put under the pump——"

"I insist upon your leaving my room," screamed Parsons, his rage roused to the utmost, by the unrestrained laughter of his fellow-monitors as they listened to the narrative of his mishaps. "You are laughing, are you, Empson? I'll stop *your* fun, at all events. I say, Meyler, Daly, look at Empson there——look at the aristocratic cut of his clothes! look at the air of *hauteur* that distinguishes him from the common herd! You would think he was the son of a nobleman, wouldn't you, or a fellow with a pedigree as old as the Plantagenets at the least? Bless you, his father is the master of a union workhouse about ten or twelve miles from here—a fellow who sets paupers to pick oakum, and looks after their diet of bread and cheese and gruel!"

All eyes were turned in astonishment on Empson as they heard this speech, the monitors believing it to be a mere ebullition of Parsons's ill humour. But the deep crimson that suffused Empson's face, the utter confusion and mortification which every feature expressed, showed only too plainly that it was no invention. He turned upon Parsons with a look of the most bitter hatred, and was perhaps only restrained by his helpless condition from actually striking

him. Then without a word he walked straight to the door, and slammed it behind him.

"A rum go that," remarked Meyler, coolly. "So that 's Empson's secret, is it? Well, he always was a snob, so it 's not very surprising. But go on with what you were saying, Armstrong. If it was Cobbe who played this trick, why did Parsons accuse Locke of it?"

"He hadn't the slightest ground for doing so," said Armstrong, "as you may remember I told you before. He simply saw a letter of Cobbe's in Locke's possession, and because the handwriting was the same as that of his hoaxing letter, chose to fancy that Locke knew all about it. Whereas Cobbe told me himself, that he had no other accomplice than Rolles, and that no boy in the school knew anything about the hoax."

"And these three fellows have cut and run then to avoid the school thrashing they were to have had to-day?" asked Daly. "Well, of course, Formby must be told, and a proper row there 'll be. I wish you were at Jericho, Parsons. You have done nothing but get us into scrapes and give us trouble for weeks past. You have got it already—first of all from the snobs, and secondly from the juniors, and in the third place you are likely to get it from Formby, or I declare I think I should be inclined to give you something myself, to teach you to know your place. Well, Meyler, what 's to be done? It 's a good job, anyway, that we haven't actually thrashed these fellows."

"Yes," said Meyler. "There would have been a worse row if we had, no doubt. But it will be quite bad enough

as it is. The proper thing is for Empson to go and report that these three juniors have run away. But I expect he is sulky and won't go; in which case, Armstrong, you must."

"I have no objection," said Armstrong. "I will go to Formby at once, and afterwards I shall make Master Corny go also."

CHAPTER XXII.

"ALL right so far," exclaimed Harry, as the three boys passed uninterrupted through the gate of the college quadrangle a little after half-past six in the morning, and turned into the narrow lane which led to the back yard of the "Lyndford Arms." "All right so far. A good dodge that of the unpaid parcel. I wonder whether Mother Wilson is reading it now?"

"I am not quite so sure it *is* all right," returned Poole. "I almost fancied Jem saw us. He stopped and looked back, that's certain."

"I think he only heard the noise of our feet in the passage," said Oliver, "and that might have been one of the other servants, you know."

"Yes," said Poole. "No doubt if he had guessed the truth, he would have been after us at once. Still, if we should be missed, it may put it into his head what has become of us. We had better be cautious."

"With all my heart," said Oliver. "What do you propose to do?"

"I think we had better not go up to the office," said Poole. "I suppose there wouldn't be time, would there, to get to Lyndford before the 'Highflyer'?"

"Certainly not," was the reply. "Why, it's six miles by

the path along the lake. The 'Highflyer' would be gone long before we could get there."

"I suppose it would," assented Poole. "And, besides, it would look much more suspicious our wanting to get up there. No, I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll go into that small shop just opposite the 'Lyndford Arms,' where they sell toys, you know. There is a glass door to the shop, and from that we can see all that goes on in front of the inn, without being seen ourselves. If the coach comes up, and nobody is in sight, well and good. We can get up just at the last minute. If there is, we shall be warned in time."

"All right," said Oliver: "only we must make haste about it. It is not more than ten minutes to seven now."

They ran across the street, and entered the shop. Oliver and Locke began to look over the various articles exhibited for sale, while Poole stood at the glass door. Presently the latter uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Hallo, what now, Charlie?" said Oliver. "There is no one after us, I suppose, is there?"

"Hush! yes," said Poole, drawing back. "Here's Armstrong, I declare, and Jem with him. He must have heard us, then, and has told Armstrong."

"Yes, and Armstrong, like a kind fellow as he is," said Locke, "has come to advise us to go back. I wish you would do so, Charlie."

"We'll go back if you like it," said Poole, "if you will promise to go home by the 'Highflyer.' I have said before, and I say again, I don't care what these brutes do to me. But I won't have you thrashed, Herbie, and that's all about it."

"I shan't leave you," returned Locke, shortly.

"And, besides," urged Oliver, "most likely Jem has told not Armstrong, but Marsh, and Marsh has sent Armstrong up to bring us back. I think we should be very foolish to give up the thing now we have got so far. At all events, let us wait till Armstrong and Jem are gone, and then we can talk about what we are to do."

The other two assented to this; and Poole, maintaining his position, continued to watch the motions of the enemy. He noticed, with satisfaction, that though both Armstrong and Jem Watt carefully scrutinized all the passengers by the "Highflyer," they did not come to speech with Tom Brindley or the ostlers. The coach stopped but a very short time, being, as it happened, rather late. In a few minutes it was rattling down the High Street, and the two discomfited emissaries from the college were on their way homewards.

"Now the sooner we are out of the town the better," said Poole, as they hurried out of the shop. They turned into another lane, and gained the Lyndford Road, passing through the back parts of the town, and in twenty minutes or so had reached the cover of Lyndford Wood. Here they sat down to rest on a stile for a few minutes; for though the morning was bracing, the pace at which they had travelled had somewhat exhausted them. They made use of the occasion to hold a council as to what was to be done next.

"We can go on to Lyndford and write a letter home," suggested Locke, "and wait there until we hear. This is Thursday. They would get the letter on Saturday morning, and we could have an answer on Monday."

"They would know us at Lyndford," said Oliver. "And it's ten to one but they would be sending a message to Formby."

"Besides which," said Poole, "fellows from the college are continually coming over to Lyndford, particularly the monitors. Most probably they would either see us, or hear of us from some one. No, we must go farther on to try that."

"Very well, then," said Locke, "we can go on to Stackleigh, that's seven miles further, I believe."

"Yes, but it's only a small village," said Oliver. "I remember we came through it on the coach. They would be quite as likely to suspect us there, and send to Formby, as they would be at Lyndford. No, we had better try and reach Gorchester—that's eight or nine miles beyond Stackleigh. It's a large place, and no one will trouble themselves about us there. We can manage twenty miles, I suppose, can't we, with all the day before us?"

"You and I certainly can," said Poole, "and we must try to get a lift for Herbie, if possible. Yes, that will be best, Harry—we 'll get to Gorchester to-night. But, on consideration, I don't agree with the plan of writing home, when we get there. Look here. I can raise money upon this watch, without selling it. I shouldn't like to sell it, because it was my mother's. But I have no doubt that a pawnbroker at Gorchester would lend me as much as thirty shillings or two pounds on it. It's old-fashioned, but it cost a lot of money when new. Well, that, with what we've got, will pay for our supper and our fares by the night coach to Binford. Of

course they would be less, by a good deal, than they are from Westonbury."

"Yes, of course," assented Oliver. "Well, I don't think we can do better. It's luckily a fine dry day. The sooner we start the better."

They set off accordingly, occasionally taking a rest on a gate or a bench in front of a public-house, and Locke once getting a lift in a donkey cart. Before twelve they had reached Stackleigh village. Here, going into the best room of the village inn, they made a good meal of cold meat, bread, cheese, and beer, for which, however, they were charged two and sixpence a head. They rested for two hours, and then paid a shilling apiece for seats in a waggon which was travelling the same road as themselves for the next five miles. About four o'clock they were set down at the fourth milestone from Gorchester. The day had now changed, and the rain was coming on with the darkness. The four miles seemed very long, especially to poor little Locke, through the cold and mud. At length, however, they entered Gorchester, though wet and footsore. They turned into the first decent inn in the High Street, and entering the coffee-room, ordered tea. This appeared to Oliver rather a rash proceeding, as their capital had now been reduced, by one demand or another, to a few shillings. Poole, however, did not share his misgiving. He called for a clothes-brush, sent out his shoes to be dried and cleaned, and then started in quest of a pawnbroker's shop, leaving Harry in charge of Locke, who was evidently a good deal done up.

"Let him have some tea as quickly as possible, Harry,"

he said, "and a mutton chop, or something of that kind, and if that doesn't freshen him up, take him to bed and cover him well up. It was very unlucky that last four miles through the wet, but one couldn't foresee it. He will not be well enough, you see, to go on to-night. We must wait for the 'Highflyer' to-morrow."

He took himself off, and returned in about an hour, having done better than he expected. The watch was more valuable than he had been aware of, and the man had advanced him three pounds upon it. This sum was more than sufficient for all their requirements. He had made inquiries at one of the inns, and found that the outside fare from Gorchester to Binford was twelve and sixpence. That would leave him, therefore, more than a pound for their bill at the inn.

"Of course, it won't be anything like that, you know, Harry. I saw the prices of things up in the bar. The beds are only two shillings apiece, tea and breakfast eighteenpence a head. We are all right now. You have sent Herbert to bed, have you?"

"Yes," said Oliver. "He drank his tea, and ate one chop and some potato, though he didn't seem to want it. But I am pretty sure it is nothing but that he is over-tired, and that he will be all right in the morning; he was asleep almost as soon as he turned in."

"That's all right," said Poole. "Now, then, let us have our tea, and make ourselves jolly." The two boys accordingly proceeded to make a hearty meal, after which they drew their chairs to the fire, and finding they had the coffee-room to themselves, had a long talk over the occurrences of

the day. They were neither of them afraid of encountering their friends at home.

"I am sure my father will say that we did right not to allow Herbie to have one of those infernal school thrashings from that beast Sykes. It's all very well saying that he wouldn't have licked him much. Sykes is brute enough for anything, and no one could have stopped him but Meyler——"

"And Meyler wouldn't care if he cut the flesh off his back, I believe," said Poole. "No, I am sure no one would blame us for having prevented that; and, to say the truth, I shouldn't care very much if any one did. I can't say either that I am particularly sorry to have got out of it myself, though I wouldn't have chivied on purpose. I suppose they won't send us back to be pitched into, will they?"

"Not very likely, Charlie," said Oliver, smiling. "I don't know exactly what they will do, but I am pretty sure they won't do that."

About ten o'clock they went off to bed, and woke the next morning quite refreshed. Even Herbert seemed himself again. "He was a little dull," he said, "and didn't feel very hungry; but otherwise he was all right."

They were dressed and had their breakfast and paid their bill before eight o'clock; and as the "Highflyer" seldom reached Gorchester before half-past nine, they had resolved to take an hour's stroll about the place, and see anything there might be worth looking at. Harry and Locke went up the street, while Charlie stepped into the coach office at which the "Highflyer" stopped (it was attached to a different

inn from that in which they had slept) for the purpose of asking the ostler to secure three places altogether, in front if he could. As he entered the yard, he heard the functionary in question in conversation with one of the waiters.

"When did they run off?" asked the latter.

"Jack says yesterday morning," answered the ostler. 'They was to have gone by the 'Highflyer,' but for some reason they didn't. They belongs to some place near Binford, and it's supposed that that's where they are making for. But nothing has been heard of them up to eight last night, when the night coach left Westonbury."

The waiter proceeded with his inquiries, but Charlie had heard quite enough. Fortunately neither of the men had noticed him. He walked as quietly as he could out of the inn yard, and as soon as he had regained the High Street, ran after his companions, whom he saw about a hundred yards ahead of him. Catching each by an arm, he drew them down the first turning, and hurried them along a secluded lane, till they reached an old empty cart-shed. Looking carefully round in all directions to assure himself that there was no one in sight, he drew his companions inside this, and then told them what he had heard.

"There 's some one after us, I expect," he said, "or at all events a reward has been offered to anybody who will give information. It won't do to go back to the 'Wheatsheaf' again. I thought the woman at the bar looked a little doubtful last night when we told her we hadn't any luggage. But she is safe to be down upon us, as soon as she hears the report."

"It's a great nuisance," said Harry. "Of course the same inquiries have been sent all along the road, and we can't go by either the 'Highflyer' or the 'Eclipse.'"

"Of course not. We should be asked questions at any of the coach offices—at Oldborough or Stoverton, or even at Milhampton or Pulstead. We must make our way to Barstone in a different way altogether."

"How can we manage that?" asked Oliver, dubiously.

"Well, it's not so easy, but it is to be managed," returned his companion. "We have got only a quarter of the way to Binford, certainly, but we have got lots of time before us, and lots of money too, which we hadn't yesterday. If we mind what we are about, and make inquiries, I have no doubt we can get lifts, as we did yesterday, from one place to another, and, anyhow, we have tin enough to pay for our food and lodging. We needn't knock under till we have nothing left. I think we had better try to get to Oldborough to-day. Oldborough, you know, is just half-way to Barstone, and twenty-two miles from here."

"How about the day?" said Oliver, going to the door of the shed and looking up into the sky.

"I don't think it will rain," said Poole. (When did a boy ever think it would rain, when he wished it to be fine?) "Anyhow we had better be off. We have secured our breakfasts this time, at all events."

They emerged from the shed, and making their way to the high road, set out stoutly on their journey. They were now, however, obliged to observe more caution than before, dodging behind hedges or into cottages, whenever a coach or a

gentleman's carriage, or even a man on horseback, came in sight, and waiting until it had passed. This considerably delayed their journey, and was, besides, very annoying. They were glad when, about six miles from Gorchester, they overtook a cart, or rather a kind of caravan, belonging to one of those itinerant merchants called Cheap Jacks, which was progressing slowly in the same direction as themselves. The machine seemed to be a small upholsterer's shop on its travels. Carpets, mats, and rugs hung down on both sides. Brooms, mops, brushes of all kinds were fastened against the corners. On the top were seen clusters of pots, kettles, coal-scoops, fire-irons, carpenters' tools, tinware of all kinds, in such abundance that it seemed a perfect marvel how they could have been stowed away. The door was open, and through it the boys, as they came up, could see a woman seated on a bench, engaged in darning a stocking, while a stout sturdy-looking man trudged along beside the horse's head. Painted over the lintel appeared the name of R. Marks.

"Hadn't we better try to get a lift?" suggested Oliver, as they drew near this conveyance. "I don't expect," he added in a lower tone, "that Herbie will be able to walk very far to-day. He hasn't spoken a word for the last hour, and it is as much as he can do to keep up with us."

"I have no objection, Harry," said Poole. "I dare say we can make a bargain with the fellow. It has its advantages, no doubt. There is a bench to sit down upon, and it is sheltered from the rain if that should come on again, and people passing along the road couldn't see us inside it. Well, we will try."

They quickened their pace, and soon came abreast of the man. The latter returned their salutation, though not very readily, and did not seem disposed to enter into conversation. To Charlie's question as to whether he thought it was going to rain, he "judged it as likely as not that it would." And on Harry's asking him whether he minded a wet jacket, replied rather gruffly that "they as minded the wet had best stay at home."

"Shall you reach Oldborough to-night, do you think?" asked Poole.

"Don't know. Depends upon business," was the answer.

This was not encouraging, but Herbert's increased weariness was becoming so evident, that Poole thought it better to open negotiations at once.

"Could you give us three a lift in your van," he said, "as far as you are going to-day?" and then, observing that the man was on the point, apparently, of giving a curt refusal, he added, "we shall be ready, of course, to pay you for it."

Mr. Marks repressed the words which were, as it were, at the very tip of his tongue, and answered instead, "Pay, will you? How much money have you got?"

"How much do you ask?" returned Poole, evading a reply.

"Well, that depends on what a body can afford to pay," said the man, in the same half-surly tone as before. "There 's three of you, you see, and there 's only one horse, and he is pretty well loaded as it is, and it 's a longish way, and the roads is heavy, and trade is bad, and a man likes to be paid for what he gives, when he is as poor as I am——"

"We don't refuse to pay you," said Poole, quickly. "We are ready to pay you anything reasonable."

"Reasonable," repeated the man. "Ah, I dare say; but what is reasonable? A poor man, who has got only a shilling or two, I shouldn't ask much of he; but a gentleman, who, maybe, has got more pounds than I 've got shillings, why, it is reasonable that he should pay more."

"Would a shilling or eighteenpence apiece satisfy you?" interposed Oliver.

"Mayhap 'twould, mayhap 'twouldn't," returned Marks, doggedly; "it all depends, as I said before, on how much money you have got."

"Now just look here," said Poole, who was getting angry at the man's strange and half-rude demeanour. "We three will pay you five shillings between us to take us to Oldborough, and that I am sure is a very fair offer. If you don't like to take that, you needn't, and we 'll hire a conveyance at the next inn we come to."

"Five shillings? well, it 's a bargain," said the man, stopping his horse. "Here, Molly," he shouted, "leave them stockings, and get out and walk. Here 's three young gents as wants a ride."

The woman obeyed the summons, and descended from the cart. Now that they had a clear view of her, she did not appear to be a more taking personage than her male companion. She was apparently about forty or five-and-forty years old. She had a red face, and hair in a very untidy state, with a red handkerchief half-tied, half-pinned over it. She wore an old blue-checked gown, which was torn in

several places, and her shoes were certainly better suited for the inside of the caravan than for the road. She began to grumble, at first, at being turned out, as she expressed it, of her own cart for other people's convenience; but on the man telling her, not in the civillest language, that the young gents was willing to pay, her demeanour altered. She muttered something about that of course making a difference, and going back to the door of the cart, took a stout pair of shoes from under the seat, which she put on. Then she invited the boys to enter the van, and as soon as they had complied, walked off to join her husband.

The inside did not appear very inviting at the first survey. There was a broadish seat on either side, allowing just enough room between, for two persons to sit opposite each other. But overhead there was a mass of articles packed as closely together as those on the outside, and emitting a smell far from pleasant in so limited an area. Stale bread and cheese, herrings, onions, tallow candles, and the like, were intermingled with crockery, knives and forks, linen, not of the cleanest, and various articles of wearing apparel, to match. Charlie was half inclined to repudiate his bargain and make a bolt for it, but Herbert was evidently glad of the rest. He seated himself in the corner, and leaned back in silence. The other two boys pulled the door wide open, and placing themselves as closely as possible to the opening, were enabled to get something like fresh air. They were neither of them inclined for conversation. The adventure had lost its charm of novelty, and was becoming flat and wearisome. However, if they reached Oldborough in safety, that was only forty

miles from Binford. They might take a post-chaise from Oldborough, and their money would hold out until they reached Milhampton, the stage before Binford. At Binford they were known to the landlord of the inn, and he would not only trust them, but send them on to Barstone. The people at Oldborough could not refuse them a post-chaise, if they told them they were going to their father's house, as they could easily satisfy them they were doing.

Having duly digested this scheme, Charlie was about to propose it to Oliver, when the cart again stopped. They found it had arrived at the "Rose and Crown," a small public-house, where Dick Marks and his wife proposed to make a stoppage, partly on account of the rain which was now beginning to fall, and partly because it offered a pretext for asking for the money, with which to pay for refreshments.

Charlie assented to this request with a very bad grace. They had hardly as yet gone four miles in the cart, and it was half-past one o'clock. But it soon became evident that Mr. Marks was not disposed to treat their remonstrances with much respect. "He hadn't asked them," he said, "to go with him, and he didn't want them. The beast couldn't drag the load through the heavy roads without rest; the weight of they three was something for a horse to pull. He hadn't bargained to go on all day without stopping, and if they didn't like it they might leave it. Anyway, he would be glad if they would be so good as to pay what they promised—that is, if they had got the money to pay it," of which fact Mr. Marks expressed himself doubtful, in terms which were by no means flattering.

Highly indignant, Charlie immediately pulled out his purse, and taking out the required sum, handed it over to the hawker, whose eyes took careful notice of the amount still retained by his passenger. He then disappeared within the inn, and the boys were left for at least an hour, to amuse themselves as they best might, in the dull muddy road, which the drizzling rain rendered doubly disagreeable, or the close caravan with its insupportable stenches. They began to get extremely uneasy. The afternoon was fast wearing away. The short winter day would soon come to its conclusion, and they were not half-way yet to Oldborough. For anything they knew, Marks might choose to pass the night in his present quarters, and having got their money, he was not unlikely to do so. They debated whether it would not be better to set off by themselves, and try to reach an inn about eight or nine miles from Oldborough, at which they remembered the coach changed horses. Here, at least, they could find accommodation for the night, and if Locke should be really unable to go on, as they were beginning to fear might be the case, they might send a letter, done up as a parcel, to Barstone by the night coach, explaining their present situation.

They had almost resolved upon this step, when Marks and his wife unexpectedly made their appearance, prepared to resume the journey. Both of them were evidently the worse for liquor, but the woman appeared to be much the more intoxicated of the two. She was just able to walk sufficiently well to reach the door of the cart, and climb the steps leading to it. Staggering up these, with her husband's

help, she seated herself, or rather tumbled into one corner, where she remained perfectly helpless. The man appeared able to walk, but drink had had the effect of rendering him more churlish and quarrelsome than before. He roughly tugged away the nose-bag from the horse's head, and catching up the whip, mounted the seat in front, and flogged the horse into a trot. The boys, who had witnessed the entrance of Mrs. Marks with great disgust, were altogether taken aback by this procedure. Locke had been seated in the opposite corner to that occupied by the woman, and appeared to be so dull and heavy as to be hardly conscious of her presence. But Poole had alighted, and Oliver was standing on the step, uncertain what to do next. Harry was almost thrown into the road, but held on by the doorpost, while his companion, running after the cart, got up beside him, and then began to shout to the driver to stop. For a long time Marks paid no heed to this summons, but his horse being at last too much blown to go farther, he pulled in, and turning back to the boys, angrily asked what they wanted.

"We can't have this," exclaimed Oliver. "We can't sit down here, with your wife lying on the floor, and filling up the whole space."

"Do you think I am going to turn my wife out of her own cart to please you?" inquired the man roughly.

"You engaged to take us to Oldborough," said Poole, "and we have paid you our money on that condition. If you haven't room for us, you are bound to give us our money back."

"I guess I can't do that," said the man with a drunken

grin; "it's pretty nigh all been paid away for grog and 'bacca. If you don't like my way of travelling, we had best part company. And I don't mean to go no further than the 'Feathers' to-night, and so I tells you. What's left of your five shillings will just pay for our bed and supper."

Oliver was going to burst out into fury, but Charlie checked him. "No use having a row with this drunken beast," he said. "It's hardly more than a mile, if I am not mistaken, to the 'Prince of Wales's Feathers,' and the rain has stopped now. We had better get down and walk the distance. I don't think this fellow means to carry us any farther, and we couldn't make him go on, if he didn't choose. Anyway, his room is better than his company."

Oliver assented. They woke up Herbert, and told him to get out. The boy obeyed, hardly aware, apparently, of what he was doing. Mr. Marks no sooner saw them clear of the cart, than he broke out into a loud laugh, lashed his horse into a broken-winded canter, and soon disappeared into the darkness.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"I AM afraid we oughtn't to have done that," said Oliver, as the two boys stood on the footpath, supporting Herbert between them. "I half think Herbie is really ill again. He doesn't seem to know where he is, and I don't believe he can walk. We had better have gone on in that cart, until we reached the 'Feathers,' at all events."

"Well, perhaps," returned Poole. "But there is no good in thinking of that now, at all events. I don't remember the road very well, and if I did, it is getting so dark that it would be enough to puzzle one. But I am pretty sure that the 'Feathers' can't be above a mile off, or a mile and a half at the outside. We can manage that distance, surely, supporting Herbert between us. He can walk, you see, with the help of our two arms, though I don't think he could alone. We must make haste, though, or we shall have the rain again."

"All right," said Oliver. "We had better each of us take one of his arms, and walk on as steadily as we can."

They set out in this manner, and proceeded for perhaps a quarter of a mile, when they found they could go no farther. Locke was evidently becoming worse. He was now a dead weight in their arms, and they had to drag rather than assist him to walk. At last they came to a standstill opposite a

gate, against which they propped him, while they rested themselves for a few minutes.

"This won't do, Harry," said Poole. "We haven't got a quarter of a mile yet, and he is becoming quite helpless. And here 's the rain too, as I feared. We shall be all wet through long before we can reach the 'Feathers,' and that in his present state may be the death of him."

"Isn't that a shed I see there," said Oliver, peering into the darkness, "or is it only a heap of faggots?"

Poole sprang over the gate, and walked some distance into the field. "All right," he cried. "It 's a shed of some sort, and it 's dry inside. We had better get him in there, if we can."

They forced the gate open, and carried Locke in between them. There was a heap of furze, on which they laid him down. "That 's so far good," said Poole; "he hasn't had time to get wet. Now the best thing will be for me to go on to the 'Feathers' for help, while you stay here to look after him."

Oliver assented, and Charlie returning to the road, set off at a brisk pace.

He had not gone a dozen yards before he heard the voices of persons coming in the opposite direction to his own; and presently two figures, dimly visible in the dusk, advanced to meet him. Charlie was just going to address them, and ask their help in conveying Herbert to the inn, but before he could speak they began the conversation.

"Be you coming from the 'Rose and Crown'?" asked one of the new-comers, a man whose appearance, so far as

Charlie could distinguish it, was by no means prepossessing. "About two mile off, isn't it?"

"I should guess it to be about that," said Poole. "But I was going to ask you——"

"This must be one of the parties," said the man to his companion, in a low voice. "I say, sir," he added in a louder tone, "where have you left your two companions?"

"They are in the shed here," answered Charlie, a good deal surprised. But it occurred to him that Mr. Marks might have felt a little compunctious about them, particularly if he had noticed Herbie's helpless condition, and have requested these men to render them some assistance. "They are in the shed there, and I want you to help in getting one of them, who is too ill to walk, as far as the 'Feathers.'"

"Ill, hey? can't walk?" repeated the man. "If we did that, me and my mate would have to go a couple of miles and more out of our way. I suppose you would pay us for our time, master, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, of course," said Poole. "I would give you a shilling apiece."

"Well, we would do it for that, I dare say," returned the man. "Only I should like to have the money in hand first."

"I must decline to pay until we reach the 'Feathers,'" said Charlie, who had Mr. Marks's repudiation of his bargain fresh in his memory.

"And suppose, when we gets to the 'Feathers,' you says you haven't got two shillings," said the man. "What's to happen then?"

"I'll show you the money if you like it," said Poole, "and you can trust my word, I should think, that I will give it to you."

"Well, let's look at it, and p'raps that will do."

Charlie took out his purse, and opened it, examining its contents as well as he could by the imperfect light, when it was dexterously snatched from him by one of the men. "We can look for ourselves, master," he said, "and save you the trouble."

"Give me that purse back," shouted Poole, his indignation rendering him insensible to the heavy odds against him in a struggle with two such antagonists. He sprang upon the man as he spoke, and made a clutch at the purse. The assault was so vigorous, and the man so entirely unprepared for it, that it was for the moment successful. Poole regained his property, thrust it into his pocket, and was about to make off in the direction of the "Feathers," when he was collared by the other man, who had stood hitherto looking quietly on.

"You had better leave that alone," he said, "youngster, unless you want my knife across your throat, to keep you quiet."

Charlie struggled furiously to disengage himself, but he was powerless in the grasp of his stronger antagonist. The other man also came to help his companion, and the boy found himself entirely at their mercy. One of them held him fast, while the other proceeded to rifle his pockets of their contents, which, however, contained nothing in addition to the purse, except a pocket-handkerchief and an old knife.

They had just possessed themselves of the latter article when an unexpected diversion took place. The man who was holding Poole received a heavy blow on the back of the head, which caused him to quit his hold and stagger back, stunned and almost stupefied for the moment. Poole sprang upon the other and endeavoured to wrest the purse from him; and the two men, in the darkness and confusion, not knowing who their new assailants might be, seemed to be upon the point of taking to their heels. But the moon, which had been hitherto obscured by a succession of thick clouds, broke out at this moment, and showed the two footpads that their new antagonist was only a boy of the same age as the other, armed with no more formidable weapon than a stout hurdle stake. With a savage oath the man flung himself upon Oliver, and soon succeeded in wresting the cudgel from his grasp, while he shouted to his companion to lay hold of Poole and prevent his escape. The two boys were now in very serious danger. The passions of the men had been roused by the sight of Poole's money, as well as by the blows they had received. Two minutes more might have ended both their lives. But at this moment the rumbling of wheels as they came down the hill from Gorchester was heard, and lighted lamps were distinguishable not two hundred yards off. The boys saw them too, and shouted for help at the top of their voices. Furious as the marauders were, the danger they might incur by remaining longer was too serious for them to encounter. They sprang over the hedge, and disappeared in the darkness, while the two boys, thankful for their unexpected deliverance, leaned in a state

of exhaustion against the gate for support. Presently the carriage—a post-chaise, with a man seated outside on the dickey—drove up, and Charlie, who had in some degree recovered himself, advanced into the road, and called to the rider to stop. But the man paid no heed to him at first, and when Charlie began to run along by the side of his horse, repeating his entreaties, he raised his whip and struck him sharply over the cheek. The pain of the blow and the indignity restored for the moment the boy's exhausted energies.

"How dare you do that?" he shouted. "You must stop, you shall stop. I tell you there is a person dangerously ill." As he spoke, he rushed up to the horse's head and seized hold of the curb.

The postboy broke out into a volley of oaths, and would have brought down the butt of his whip with all his force on Poole's head and shoulders, if the window of the chaise had not at this moment been thrown open, and a gentleman leaning out called on the postboy to stop. "What is the meaning of this?" he exclaimed. "Who are you, and what is it you want?" he added, addressing Charlie.

"It 's a young tramp wanting to beg, I judge," said the servant on the dickey.

"I am not a tramp," shouted Charlie, indignantly. "I and my companions are gentlemen. We were on our way to Oldborough, and one of us has been taken ill, and can't go any farther. If you will be so kind, sir, as to take him in the carriage to the nearest inn, which is, I believe, not a mile off, that is all I ask. We will run along by the side ourselves."

"I will do that, certainly, my good lad," said the gentleman, throwing open the chaise door and alighting. "Arnulpho, come with me. Where is your friend, may I ask?" he resumed, turning again to Poole.

"In a shed, just on the other side of that gate," answered Charlie. "We must carry him. He is quite insensible."

The stranger put his hand into his pocket and drew out a box of matches, by the help of which he lighted a small lantern. Guided by this they entered the shed, where they found Herbert still lying in the same posture in which they had left him. The gentleman bent down, and put his ear to the boy's mouth.

"I don't think your friend is seriously ill," he said. "I know some little about medicine, and he appears to me to be more feverish and exhausted than anything else. But he must not, of course, be left here. Arnulpho, help me to raise him."

The two men between them lifted Herbert, and carrying him to the chaise, laid him across the seat in the easiest posture possible under the circumstances. "You had better come inside with me," said the gentleman, addressing Poole, "and your friend can sit beside Arnulpho on the box."

The boys, who were most unwilling to lose sight of Locke, were soon induced to accept this courtesy, and in a few minutes the chaise was again on its way.

"I beg your pardon," said Charlie, when they had gone some little distance in company, "but I can't help thinking that I have met you somewhere before. May I ask if you were at Westonbury Fair last summer?"

"Yes," replied the gentleman, "I was; and I think it very likely you may have seen me there. But what makes you suppose so?"

"I thought I recognized the name of your assistant—your servant, Arnulpho," said Charlie, hesitating.

"Ah, I see. You saw me perform at Westonbury Fair. I am just on my way now to a similar exhibition at Oldborough."

"And do you remember the affair of the half-crown?" asked Poole, timidly.

"Half-crown, what half-crown? I have plenty to do with half-crowns," he added good-naturedly.

"Ah, but this was a half-crown put into one of our pockets, as we went in, and we found it out, and——"

"And played off a capital trick. Was that it?"

"Yes," said Charlie. "You came and spoke to us afterwards very kindly, and said you would be glad to help us if ever you had the opportunity."

"I remember it quite well," said Mr. Lucas, "and I am very glad to have the opportunity of keeping my promise now. And I suppose you three must be the young gentlemen from Westonbury, about whom I heard the people at the inn talking at Gorchester?"

"Yes," said Charlie. "We are on our way home. They wanted to thrash our companion so cruelly that we couldn't bear it, and we are taking him home to his father. I hope you will help us, sir."

"I wouldn't help boys to run away from school," said Lucas. "But if you are going home to your parents, that is a different matter. Where do they live?"

"At Barstone, near Binford. That is about forty miles from Oldborough, you know."

"Yes, I know," said the other. "And how do you propose to get there?"

"We had money sufficient to take us, but two men set upon us, just before you came up, and have stolen it all."

"Set upon you and robbed you!" said Mr. Lucas. "Was that the meaning of the shouts then that we heard, just before we came up with you? They woke me up out of my sleep, or I mightn't have noticed you as we drove past. Tell me all that happened."

Poole complied, and had just completed his narrative, when the chaise drew up at the door of the "Feathers."

"We change horses here," said Mr. Lucas. "But I think you had better go on with me to Oldborough. I don't fancy, as I said before, that there is anything serious the matter with your friend. But it would be as well to have a medical man's opinion. And, besides, you wouldn't be able to get proper accommodation here."

"You are very kind," said Poole. "If it does not really inconvenience you, I am sure we should be most thankful."

"I shall be very glad," was the reply, "of the opportunity of showing how much I appreciate your conduct at Westonbury Fair."

In another hour and a half they reached Oldborough, and proceeded to the best inn, where accommodation had already been ordered for El Hakeem, as he now again called himself. The boys were supposed to belong to his party, and the inquiries, therefore, were not made about them which

otherwise in all likelihood would have taken place. Locke was consigned to a decent bed-room, and the nearest doctor sent for. His examination confirmed in a great measure El Hakeem's opinion. The boy had caught a feverish cold from exposure to the weather, and over-excitement and work, and he required a good rest; but after that, there appeared no reason why he should not travel homewards by the coach.

Greatly relieved by this information, the boys attended their new friend's *séance*, which took place, according to advertisement, in the town hall, and went off with great *éclat*. Afterwards they partook of his supper, and then went to bed, greatly delighted at the issue of their day's adventures.

On the following morning Mr. Lucas took leave of them. He was about to proceed westwards to another large town, where he was advertised to exhibit that night. But before he went, he went into a calculation with them, as to the sum which it would cost to take them home. "I will secure places for you by the coach," he said, "so that no questions will be asked, and lend you the money necessary to pay for them. At what time does the 'Highflyer' pass through?"

"Just at twelve," said Poole. "The coaches stop here to dinner, and the coachmen change."

"Very well, then, we will go down and secure the places at once." They went down accordingly, and engaged the places; after which, Mr. Lucas took his departure in his post-chaise. "You had better write to me at my own home, which is at Twickenham, near London," he said in answer to Charlie's inquiries. "I shall hope to hear that you have got home quite safely." They shook hands and parted.

"That's a regular brick, Charlie," said Oliver, as they watched the departure of the chaise. "Who could have thought that a conjuring fellow would turn out like that?"

"It is a good job for us that he did, Harry," said Poole. "He never played off a better trick, I'll be bound, than he did yesterday afternoon, when he rescued us from those two blackguards. But we must go and look after Herbie. He must get up and dress now."

A good night's rest and proper food had done a good deal towards Locke's restoration. He was still very weak and tired, but in other respects more like himself again. By the time he was dressed, it was nearly twelve o'clock, and the boys having paid their bill, went down into the inn yard to wait for the "Highflyer," which might now be expected in a few minutes. They were standing with their eyes fixed in the direction whence it was to arrive, when all of a sudden Oliver's arms were seized from behind, and a well-known voice exclaimed, "Harry, my boy, can this really be you?"

The boys faced round in equal amazement. Three gentlemen had alighted from the up coach, which had come in a few minutes before, and were just on the point of entering the inn door. They were Lieutenant Oliver, Mr. Locke, and an upright elderly man with grey hair and moustache, whose bearing declared unmistakably the soldier. Charlie and Harry each seized a hand of Mr. Oliver, while Herbert rushed up to his father.

"Herbert! thank God we have found you," said Mr. Locke. "Come into the inn, and tell us what has happened."

They were soon seated in one of the private rooms of the

inn, where Poole was presented to his great-uncle, General Sydenham; who, the boys learned, had been on a visit to Barstone, when a letter from Dr. Formby arrived, informing Lieutenant Oliver that his son, together with young Poole and Locke, had left Westonbury early on the day on which he wrote—that is, the Thursday—and it was generally supposed were on their way to Barstone. The attempt to trace the course they had taken had, thus far, been unsuccessful; but Lieutenant Oliver might be assured that no pains would be spared in following the fugitives, who, he trusted, were already safe with their parents. Inquiry also must of course be made as to the causes which had led to such a step as that taken by the boys, than which nothing could have been less expected by Dr. Formby.

"As soon as I got this letter," continued Mr. Oliver, "I of course consulted with Mr. Locke and General Sydenham, and we agreed that our best course would be immediately to go to Westonbury, making inquiries at the different places through which we passed. We must now decide whether we are to go on to Westonbury, or return to Barstone, and we have only ten minutes in which to determine the matter. I should like to know your opinion, general."

"I will give you my opinion readily enough," said General Sydenham. "My lads, have you done anything that you are ashamed of?—have you run away to escape any punishment?"

"No, sir," said Charlie and Harry in the same breath.

"They ran away to save me from punishment," said Herbert. "It is I who am to blame for what has happened."

"No, no, Herbie," again exclaimed the two boys in the

same breath. "You are not to blame at all. We made him go away with us, sir," added Poole, "or he would have remained there and been half killed."

"I have no difficulty in answering your question, Oliver," said General Sydenham, who had been watching the faces of the lads. "We had better go on by the 'Highflyer,' and take the boys with us. Suppose you two travel inside, with Harry and Herbert, and hear their story; while I sit on the outside with my great-nephew. We shall know all about it, long before we reach Westonbury."

They took their places accordingly, and the coach departed. At the "Lyndford Arms" they had another consultation.

"General Sydenham," said Mr. Locke, "Oliver and I agree that this is a very awkward business; and we, not being public school men, hardly know how to deal with it. We want you kindly to undertake the management of the affair."

"I have no objection," said the general, "and I think I see my way. The first thing, of course, will be to get some dinner, and send a cheque, with a letter of thanks, to that good fellow Lucas. After that, I propose that we all go down together to Dr. Formby's."

CHAPTER XXIV.

DR. FORMBY was seated in his study, engaged in the revision of some of the Sixth Form exercises. The reader has not yet been personally introduced to him. He was a man of middle height, with a high forehead, a thoughtful cast of features, and a kindly smile. Somewhat stiff and prejudiced in his notions, he was nevertheless just and conscientious, and had laboured all his life to do his duty by the boys placed under him, though, like most of us, his performances fell considerably short of his theories. A letter from General Sydenham, who had informed him in it of his arrival in England, was lying on the table; and every now and then, when the Doctor's eye lighted on the handwriting, he fell into a reverie, which rendered him for the moment oblivious of false quantities and un-Ciceronian phrases. A rap at the door roused him.

"Who is that? What, Armstrong! have you come for the themes? I have not finished them yet."

"No, sir, I have come to report that three boys belonging to my house are missing, and nobody knows, with any certainty, where they are gone to."

"Boys missing? Do you mean that they have run away? Who are they?"

"It appears that they have, sir. They are Poole, Oliver, and Locke."

"Indeed!" said the Doctor, with an expression of much surprise. "Poole, I think, is General Sydenham's great-nephew." He took up the letter on the table and glanced through it. "Yes, 'my great-nephew, Charles Poole,'" he read out. "And he expresses his satisfaction that he is doing so well here. Young Locke, too—a new boy, is he not?"

"Yes," said Armstrong. "He came at the beginning of this half."

"And Mr. Marsh has uniformly spoken to me of him as one of the best boys in his house," continued the Doctor. "Indeed, he has a good opinion of all these boys. This is a strange business, Armstrong. What could have induced them to run away?"

Armstrong hesitated.

'You must tell me, Armstrong. This is a serious matter. I have not had the case of a boy running away from school for years past; and never, since I have been head master, have I known any one do so, whose character stood as high as that of these boys. There must have been some grave reason."

"Well, Dr. Formby," said Armstrong, "they were to have had a school thrashing to-day."

"Indeed! and what for?"

"For booking, that is, throwing books at a monitor," said Armstrong.

"Pelting a monitor with books!" exclaimed the Doctor, in still greater surprise than before. "Who was the monitor, pray?"

"Parsons, sir, the junior monitor in my house."

"Parsons," once more repeated the Doctor. "You can't be serious, Armstrong, to be sure! These three little boys —Locke particularly, who is little more than a child—assault and thrash a monitor of Parsons's size! Why did he allow them to do it?"

"It wasn't they only. All Marsh's house joined in it."

"The whole house joined in attacking Parsons! Of course this will require a thorough investigation. What induced these boys to attack a monitor? What had he done?"

"It is a long story, sir, and I don't know all the rights of it myself. There was a trick played off upon Parsons, which he thought Locke was implicated in, though he was not; and he was going to give him a severe caning for it."

"Not without proof, I suppose, that he was concerned in it?" interrupted the Doctor.

"Well, yes. I don't defend Parsons. In fact, no doubt he has been hard upon Locke all the half."

"Bullied him, in fact?" suggested the Doctor.

"So Hutton, who sleeps in his room, says," said Armstrong, "and several others, who know more about it than I do."

"Then the boys were disgusted with Parsons for his treatment of Locke, and fell upon him in a body—is that what I understand to have happened?"

"Pretty much that," said Armstrong. "They sent a letter to him first, asking him not to do it, and when he refused to comply, they pelted him with books."

"Why did not the boy appeal to the head of his house—that is Empson, I think?"

"An appeal was made to Empson, sir—I made one myself. But he would not interfere to stop it."

"Well, Armstrong, everything you tell me only goes to prove that this affair demands the most searching inquiry. But the boys must first be found, in order that we may hear their story. Have they gone to their homes, do you think?"

"I believe they intended to go there, sir. But they did not travel by the 'Highflyer' this morning. I went up to the coach office myself, and they were not there."

"Very well. You have done right, Armstrong. I shall write immediately to these boys' fathers, and see that inquiries are made in all the directions which they are likely to have taken. I suppose I may reckon upon their being found before Saturday afternoon. As that is a half holiday, it will be the best time for entering fully into this matter. Desire Meyler, Holloway, and Empson to come here at seven o'clock on that day. Come also yourself, and bring Parsons, if he is well enough at that time to go out."

During the next two days, the greatest excitement prevailed in the school. Reports without end were circulated as to the movements of the three missing boys; but they all proved, upon inquiry, to be without authority. Nothing whatever, in fact, had been learned respecting them. Saturday morning arrived, and still no intelligence had been received. When the masters and monitors assembled in the Doctor's study at the time named by him, it was only to learn that all attempts to discover the route taken by the runaways had completely failed.

"I have, however, learnt a good deal which throws light upon this matter," said Dr. Formby. "I find that the letter written to Parsons, which seems to have been the beginning of the mischief, was not the work of any boy now in the school, but the joint production of young Cobbe, who left at the end of last half-year, and his relative Mr. Rolles, Mr. Briggs's articled clerk. They have been here, and expressed to me their regret for the misconduct they were guilty of in sending that letter, and for the consequences which have ensued from it. There is no further need to speak of them. But I should be glad to ask you, Parsons, what reason you had for assuming that Locke was the author of the letter, or in any way concerned in it?"

"He knew whose handwriting the letter was in," said Parsons.

Armstrong was about to speak, but the Doctor stopped him. "That is certainly not the case," said Dr. Formby. "Cobbe tells me that nobody in the school knew anything about the trick, and that Locke could not have recognized his handwriting, as he had never written to him in his life."

"At all events I thought he did," said Parsons.

"Even that is not true, Parsons—utterly insufficient as such a ground would have been for thrashing any junior. Hutton, with whom I had a long talk, and who has told me what your usage of this little boy has been throughout the half-year, says that what Locke refused to tell you was, from whom he got the letter. The boy in question was Poole, who had no more to do with the trick than Locke himself had; but the little fellow feared that you would make it the

occasion of inflicting further hardships on his friend, if he answered your question. Meyler, I now wish to ask you how it was that you and the other four that compose the council, allowed this school thrashing to be inflicted—or rather *would* have allowed it, if the boys had remained here to receive it—without any evidence that the boys in question had deserved it?"

Meyler looked particularly uncomfortable. Fifty times over he had wished Parsons, and Empson too, a hundred miles away, before they had involved him in this tiresome mess. He plucked up courage, however, to answer, "We thought an attack upon a monitor, sir, too serious a thing to be passed over."

"And you thought quite right. But did you inquire as to what had led to the attack upon the monitor? whether the monitor himself was in any degree to blame for what had occurred?"

"We didn't think that our business," said Meyler.

"You didn't, hey? You thought it your business to take the matter up, but not to inquire into it. Were all five of the same opinion?"

"No, sir," said Meyler, reluctantly. "Holloway thought differently about it."

"I am glad to hear that, Holloway," said Dr. Formby, with an approving nod. "But still, Meyler, on your own showing, I cannot understand this. The three boys were to be thrashed, were they not, for their attack on Parsons? Granting that you might have supposed Poole and Oliver to have been concerned in that matter, it is impossible that you

could have thought the same of Locke. Why did you agree to include him in the punishment?"

Meyler turned very red. "Empson," he said awkwardly, "declared that Locke had been at the bottom of the whole mischief."

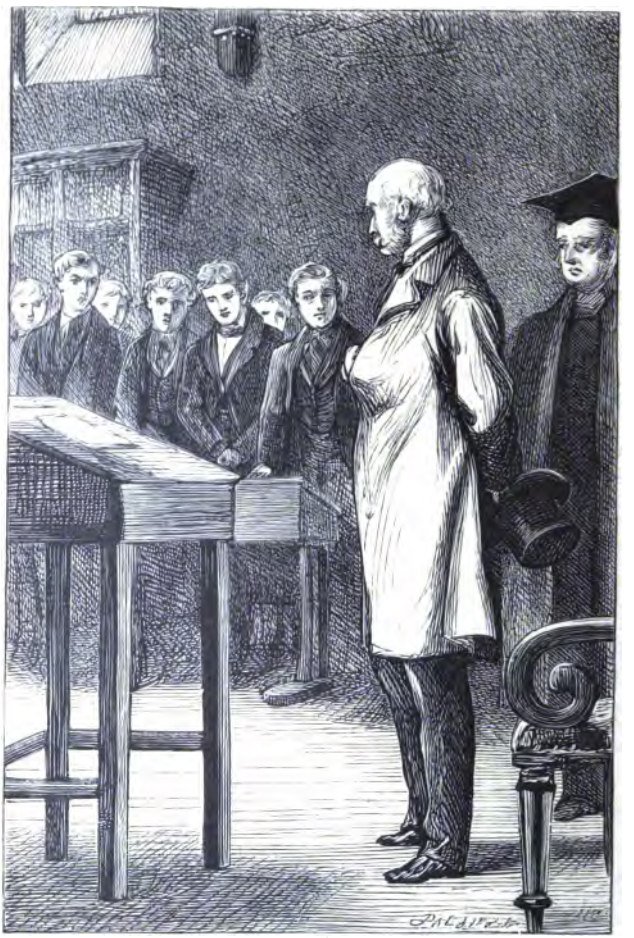
"Empson?" repeated the Doctor. "Ah, I see it all now. He was here this morning before he left, and told me—I am glad to say, with signs of real regret—the true cause of Parsons's influence over him. Well, we can say no more now, I suppose, until these unfortunate boys can be produced to tell their own story."

He was interrupted by a knock at the door, and a servant entering, informed him that the three missing young gentlemen had returned, and some gentlemen with them.

The head master went out into the hall to receive his visitors; and the first thing he saw by the light of the gas-lamp was the face of his old friend, General Sydenham, which he instantly recognized, notwithstanding the lines and wrinkles of nearly forty years, and the scanty grey locks, which had taken the place of the dark curls he so well remembered.

"Sydenham!" "Formby!" a hearty grasp of the hand was exchanged; and then the Doctor turned with befitting courtesy to his other guests, whom he ushered into his drawing-room, and a long conversation followed.

"Your information exactly tallies with that I have elicited," said the Doctor, at its close. "You may trust me that full justice shall be done these lads. I was engaged when you arrived with some of the assistant masters and the head



GENERAL SYDENHAM ADDRESSING THE BOYS.—P. 365

monitors, in investigating the business. Will you step in and speak with them?"

"I am quite sure, Formby, that you will do the fullest justice," said his friend. "But would you object to allow me to say a few words to the whole assembled school? Lieutenant Oliver and Mr. Locke have deputed the management of this matter to me, knowing that I am an old Westonbury. Have you any objection?"

"Certainly not," said Dr. Formby. "I do not know how I could refuse such a request to any one, under the circumstances; and if there is anybody in the world whom I could trust to address them, it would be you. The boys are just now assembling for evening chapel, and you can speak to them in the school as soon as it is over."

A hasty summons was accordingly dispatched, desiring the boys, instead of returning to their boarding-houses, to muster in the school-room when the service was over. Of course such a notice provoked eager inquiry, and when it was known that the three Barstone boys had returned, and that the affair respecting them was going to be publicly dealt with, the greatest interest was instantly aroused. The appearance of the three gentlemen in the college chapel, and particularly of General Sydenham, with his bronzed features and "war-bleached locks," still further heightened the feeling. When the boys were assembled in school order, and the general stood forward on the steps of the head master's desk to address them, there was so dead a silence, that a pin might have been heard to fall.

"Boys," began the old man, "I am an old Westonbury,

and my name is Sydenham. Most of you here present know that name. My boy Arthur was head monitor here last half-year."

A shout burst forth, which it was impossible to repress. "Hurrah for General Sydenham! Three cheers for Arthur's father!" was the cry; and, until they had been given, it was impossible to obtain silence. Then the general resumed.

"Boys, I heartily thank you, in my own name and my son's. It is a great gratification to me to think that his name is kindly remembered by you. But it is not about him that I wish to speak. It is about my great-nephew Poole, and his two friends, Oliver and Locke, that I have come here to-day. You mustn't think that they ran away to shirk a thrashing. If they had done so I should have been too much ashamed of them to say anything in their behalf. But just look here, my lads. Here's this little fellow;" he took Herbert Locke by the shoulder as he spoke, and drew him forward. "He was given into the charge of Charlie Poole here, and his friend Harry Oliver. Indeed, he has always been just like a younger brother to them. Well, this little fellow, without any sufficient reason (as is now acknowledged by all) was ordered to receive a hall thrashing from a great, strong, full-grown lad." He looked full at Parsons—who had been pointed out to him—as he spoke; but Parsons slunk back out of sight. "Now, I know what a 'hall thrashing' is, and I can't wonder that Poole and Oliver could not endure the thought of their friend undergoing it. They tried all legitimate means of stopping it in vain; and then they

broke out into a mutiny, and took the law into their own hands.

"Well, my lads, I don't approve of mutineers; but I'll tell you what I approve of still less, and that is, those who drive others to mutiny. Those who rebel against lawful authority must be punished, of course, and I don't say but that the monitors would have been justified in punishing Charlie and Harry for their share in the attack on one of their number; though even then I think they ought to have taken steps against the person who was the worst offender. When I was a monitor here, I know I at all events should have done so. But they had some ground for punishing Poole and Oliver; and those two lads would have undergone, without flinching, whatever sentence might have been passed upon them, if it hadn't been that little Locke was again ordered to suffer the still severer penalty, which we used to call, and which you still call, a school thrashing. They could only save him from that by taking him home to his father.

"Boys, I hope you'll forgive me if I say that I am very much astonished such a thing should ever have been proposed, and still more that it should ever have been allowed, by Westonbury monitors. I know what it is to be entrusted with power, and what a sacred trust it always is. I have had authority committed to me during war-time, of ordering men, on my own bare word, to be flogged, or even hanged or shot. But never in my life have I considered myself more distinctly or more solemnly responsible for the power given into my hands, than I did when I was a Westonbury monitor

forty years ago. Bear in mind, that whosoever abuses his position by doing injustice himself, or allowing it to be done in his name, deserves to be degraded from it."

There was a dead silence. The boys, especially the monitors, looked very uncomfortable. But the general almost instantly resumed.

"Forgive me for saying this. I did not mean to do so when I entered the school-room. My object was to put my great-nephew and his friend right with you. I hope you will understand that, in the opinion of those best qualified to judge, they have come through a very difficult trial, like the brave lads they are. And now I wish you all good night."

The boys broke into a second cheer, louder, if possible, than the first. Charlie and Harry were escorted back to Marsh's by a guard of honour, consisting of as many boys as could contrive to get near them. Great were the rejoicings in No. 14 that evening, and keen the interest in the two boys' adventures, the *soirée* being protracted to an hour so late as to exhaust even Mrs. Wilson's patience. Tolerant as she was inclined to be in consideration of the rescue of her special favourite, Locke—which had induced her to forgive even the payment of double postage for Wilkie's French Exercises—the uproar in No. 14 became at last too much for her, and about half-past eleven she sent up a message to say that, unless the boys went instantly to bed, she would go the length of rousing Mr. Marsh himself from his slumbers to put a stop to it.

As for Locke, he was consigned to the sick-room for a day or two, until his strength was restored, and then he came out

bright and cheerful as ever. He saw none but friendly faces round him now. Empson had already taken himself off for good, in every sense of the word. Parsons he seldom encountered during the remainder of the half; and when he did fall in with him, the monitor's face bore a strong resemblance to that of a tiger behind the bars of its den, which would like to do you mischief, though it is powerless for the purpose. Parsons indeed had a bad time of it. He had been dead cut by the Sixth and Fifth; the Fourth and Third looked contemptuously at him as they passed him in the school passages; the very juniors shouted saucy nicknames in his hearing, and he dared not resent it.

After a day or two's stay in Westonbury, Mr. Oliver and Mr. Locke returned home; but the general was induced to remain as Dr. Formby's guest during the remainder of the half-year. It was a particularly busy time with the head master, and he could see little of his friend; but the latter passed a very happy week nevertheless in revisiting his old haunts, and watching the sports of the boys, and sitting sometimes in Holloway's or Armstrong's study, and talking with them of old times. He was held in such universal honour, that a copy of verses was especially written, and delivered with great effect at the recitations, entirely in celebration of his achievements and visit.

But at last the half-year was over, and the three Barstone boys, more full of pleasurable excitement than ever, mounted the "Highflyer" and were borne homewards. The other boys, and many of the masters, dispersed north, south, east, and west, and the college was left to its vacation stillness.

The day after the general departure, the two old friends walked together in the empty cricket-ground, under the leafless elms, whose foliage had overshadowed them nearly forty years before.

"Sydenham," said the Doctor, "I have a good deal to say to you, but I have deferred it till now, when everything has been completed. In the first place, I wish to tell you what I have done about the different boys. Empson, you know, left of his own accord some days ago. I am glad to say that I have received a letter from Parsons's father, withdrawing his son from the school, which has saved me the pain and trouble of requesting him to do so. Daly and Hyde leave in the ordinary course of things, and I have privately intimated to Meyler that, though I do not wish to inflict any public stigma upon him, I cannot receive him back. I have hopes of a better state of things next half-year. With Holloway for head monitor, Greenwell and Armstrong members of the council, Hutton and one or two new monitors, who are all I could wish, there is a prospect of a good and kindly government in the school. But I think I can see what you are going to add, Sydenham. This can be only temporary, and affords no security that a bad state of things will not return in the next generation."

"I was not going to say so, Formby. But I cannot deny that such is my opinion."

"And it is mine also, Sydenham. I wrote you word a twelvemonth ago that, as years went on, I was less and less satisfied with the existing *régime*. The occurrences of this last half-year have made me a convert to your view at last.

I am quite clear that the monitorial system requires two restrictions to be determinedly enforced, which it at present lacks; and that without these there is no security, but the greatest fear, of its being grievously abused. I do not mean to say, observe, that even the late deplorable occurrences prove the monitorial system to be an undesirable one. If there has been much to regret, there has also been much to rejoice at. It has done Holloway and Greenwell, and Hutton, and others of the Fifth in Marsh's, great good, to have made the manly stand they have done against oppression, and to have learned sympathy with their younger schoolfellows; while it has turned Armstrong into a finer fellow, than I ever expected to see him become."

"Aye," said the general, "and it has been of still greater service to my great-nephew and his two friends. At their age to have passed through such a trial so bravely and so rightly, cannot but be of incalculable advantage in the formation of their characters. I doubt not they will be thankful for it all their lives afterwards. But of course the evil ought to be prevented for the future, if it is possible to prevent it. What are the two restrictions of which you were speaking?"

"They are, first, that no monitor shall be allowed to give a junior a thrashing unless with the consent of the council and where he is the aggrieved party, he shall never be allowed to administer the thrashing himself."

"Good," said the old officer; "of course it will be impossible to prevent such bullying as consists in harsh and irritating words, and boxes on the ear, and a blow or two with

the fist. No police regulations can ever prevent that, or anything, in fact, but the cultivation of a Christian spirit among the boys. But your regulation will go far to check any severe suffering. By making the infliction of a thrashing on the sole authority of an individual monitor an invasion of the privileges of the others, you will establish the only legal restraint which, I believe, is possible. Well, now, your second restriction?"

"The second is, that after every monitorial thrashing, the head monitor of the boarding-house, if it is a private matter, and the head monitor of the school, if it is a public one, shall be required to report the occurrence to the tutor, or the head master, as the case may be, under penalty of immediate degradation from the Sixth Form, or even expulsion, if necessary."

"Good again," cried General Sydenham; "you know what I have always thought on that subject, and now more strongly than ever. And have you taken any steps towards putting these regulations in force?"

"Yes," said Dr. Formby. "I have talked with the five boys who will form the council next half. Three of them I found already fully inclined to adopt them. The others came into them with less difficulty than I had expected. Sydenham, I may in a great measure thank you for that. Your address to them in the school-room, and the conversations you have had with several of the head monitors during this last week, has made a profound impression upon them."

"I am heartily glad of it, Formby," said the general.

"And they have agreed, have they, to be bound by the regulations you have mentioned?"

"Yes, they have done so," said the head master. "They have promised—Holloway, Greenwell, and Armstrong, most heartily, Greaves and M'Calmont not so readily, but still I believe honestly and sincerely—that they will abide by the rules themselves, and use their influence in the school to remove any prejudice there may be against them. I fully believe they will keep their word."

"And so do I," said his friend. "And you yourself—you have got over the fears, then, that you have so often expressed on this subject?"

"Yes," said Dr. Formby. "I have always been afraid that the system of reporting was so irreconcilable with that horror of 'telling' which is natural to all brave and manly boys, that nothing would induce them really to do it—nay, even if they could be so induced, that it would lower them in their own eyes. But I hope and believe I was mistaken in that. I have seen that the monitors do report things to me against their schoolfellows, in certain cases, which the traditions of the school justify, and neither they nor their schoolfellows think there is anything mean in their doing so. There is ground, therefore, to hope that they may be induced to report these things also."

"You are right," said General Sydenham. "It is a mere question of school tradition. No one is so profound a worshipper of tradition as an English schoolboy. Let the practice of reporting thrashings once become the recognized usage of the school, confirmed by the habits of one or two

generations of boys, and no more scruples will be entertained about it, than there are now about delivering in a list of boys absent from a roll-call."

"God grant it may prove so," said Dr. Formby.

"Amen," said the general. "There are few better things in England than our public schools, and the very life of our English public schools is the monitorial system. To destroy so valuable a thing because it is not perfect, would be as foolish as to abolish trial by jury or representative government. Their very excellence is the reason, of all others, why we should endeavour to make them perfect."

THE END.

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